ADVENTURES IN THE CYPHER SYSTEM™

BY BRUCE R. CORDELL, DOMINIQUE DICKEY, SEAN K. REYNOLDS, SHANNA GERMAIN

ADVENTURES IN THE CYPHER SYSTEM™

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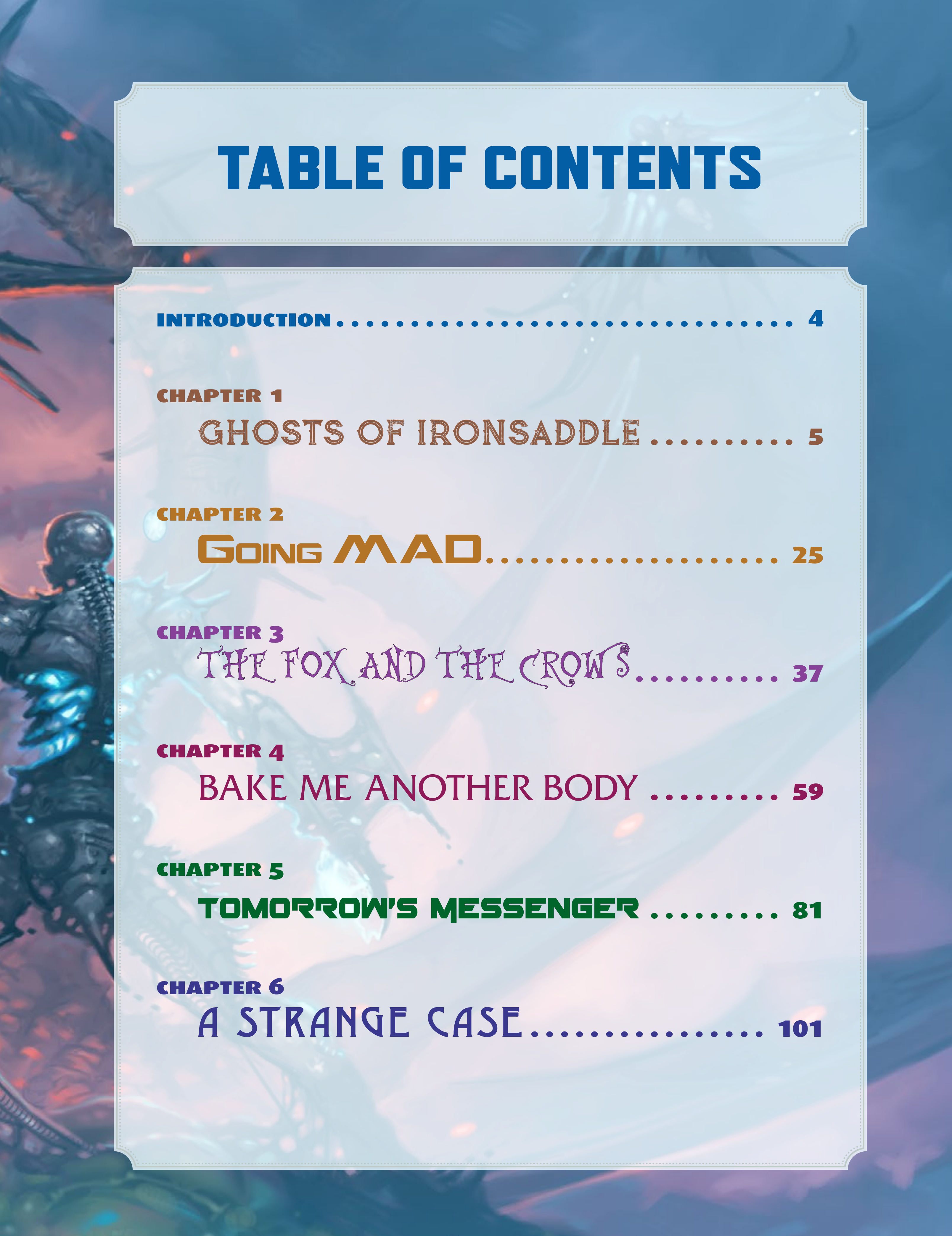
Printed in Canada



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INTRODUCTION

I love tabletop RPG adventures. I know, not a particularly audacious claim. As much as I love imagining what my elf wizard, alien starship pilot, or modern-day ghost hunter player character (PC) might do, it would all come to nothing without a scenario for a game master (GM) to run them through. A situation where my PC can strut their stuff and, with the help of the other adventurers, discover surprising, dangerous, and fun encounters. Adventures lie at the heart of the RPG experience.

Like many GMs, I've been writing adventures as long as I've been in the hobby. Certainly not good adventures, but "good" is subjective when you're twelve years old running games for your younger brother and the other scouts in your troop. But I stuck with it. I was lucky enough to befriend other passionate GMs in high school who were *truly* good at running homebrew adventures. Then it was off to college, where a new friend group needed a GM, and where I put together my first game setting—The Shattered Realm—where all my adventures took place. (I still have all those files somewhere around here . . .)

Of course, most of these adventures were never written for anyone else's use. Published adventures are a different beast. For some GMs, they're a great prompt for the game they'll actually run at their table. They'll take what they like, and adjust the rest to fit their own game. For other GMs, a published adventure is a ready-to-play experience that saves them hours of preparation, so they can spend more focus on running the game itself. When I say I love adventures, it's published adventures I'm mostly talking about.

Published adventures like the ones you'll find in this compilation! These all-new adventures showcase the Cypher System's elegant handling of different genres. They were written by experienced Cypher System GMs and authors, just for you. In these pages, you'll find explorations of weird west–horror, conspiracy theory–superhero, fairy tale, science–fantasy, time travel–science fiction, and science fiction–alternate world scenarios. You'll also find adventures that revisit fan-favorite settings of the past like *The Strange* and *Predation*.

Adventures written for specific settings are presented with enough support material that, so long as you have the *Cypher System Rulebook*, you can still run the adventure.

Onward, to adventure!

Ghosts of Ironsaddle: Weird west PC bounty hunters encounter a ghost town haunted by threats that linger unquietly. Compatible with *High Noon at Midnight* (pending release in 2025).

Going MAD: Regular, modern-day characters come face-to-face with their own incipient transformation into something super. Compatible with *The Origin*.

The Fox and the Crows: The PCs are invited to help a fairy-tale princess save a king from himself during a royal ball. Compatible with *We are All Mad Here*.

Bake Me Another Body: Characters inhabiting the earth a billion years from now investigate the mystery of who killed them and stole their artifacts while exploring a million-year-old ruin. Compatible with *Numenera*.

Tomorrow's Messenger: Descended from time-travelers stuck in the Cretaceous period, PCs discover a message in a time anomaly from someone who needs help. Compatible with *Predation*.

A Strange Case: Characters follow a fictional villain—who intends to initiate Earth's destruction—through a series of worlds seeded by stories and myths. Compatible with *The Strange*.

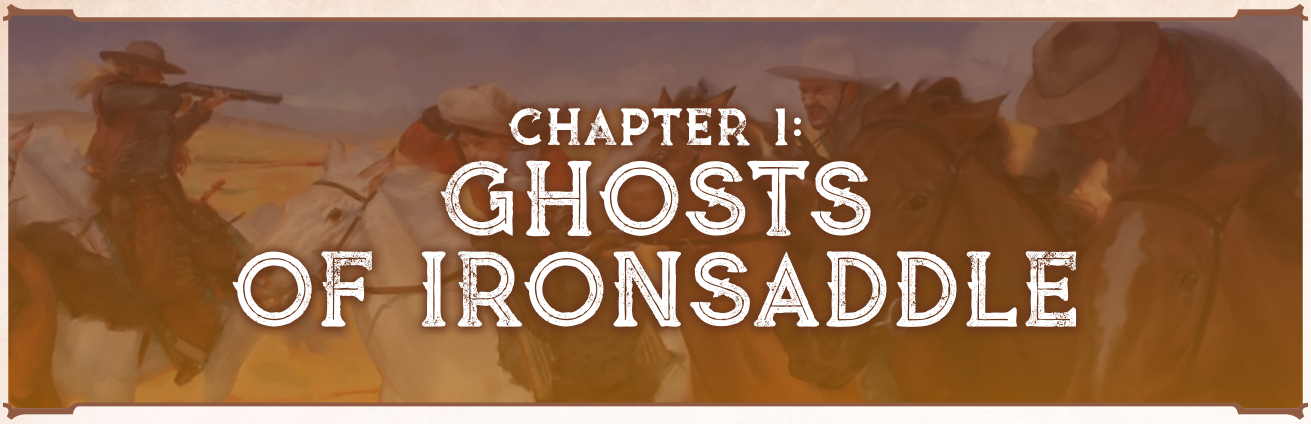
CHAPTER 1

GHOSTS OF IRONSADDLE

BY BRUCE R. CORDELL

AN ADVENTURE SHOWCASING

HIGH NOON AT MIDNIGHT



CHAPTER 1:
GHOSTS OF IRONSADDLE

Player characters (PCs) collecting bounties on dangerous cursed beasts encounter a ghost town that never appears in the same place twice. Can the players escape the threats that linger unquietly there, or will they fail to escape and join the other doomed ghosts of Ironsaddle?

"Ghosts of Ironsaddle" is adventure set in the "weird west" (see Weird West Setting Generalities) and is suitable for four to six tier 1 or tier 2 characters. (Tier 1 Pregenerated characters are provided for download.)

HOW TO USE THIS ADVENTURE

Throughout this adventure, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to the *Cypher System Rulebook*, where you can find additional details about that rule, ability, creature, or concept.

SYNOPSIS

The adventure should play out as follows.

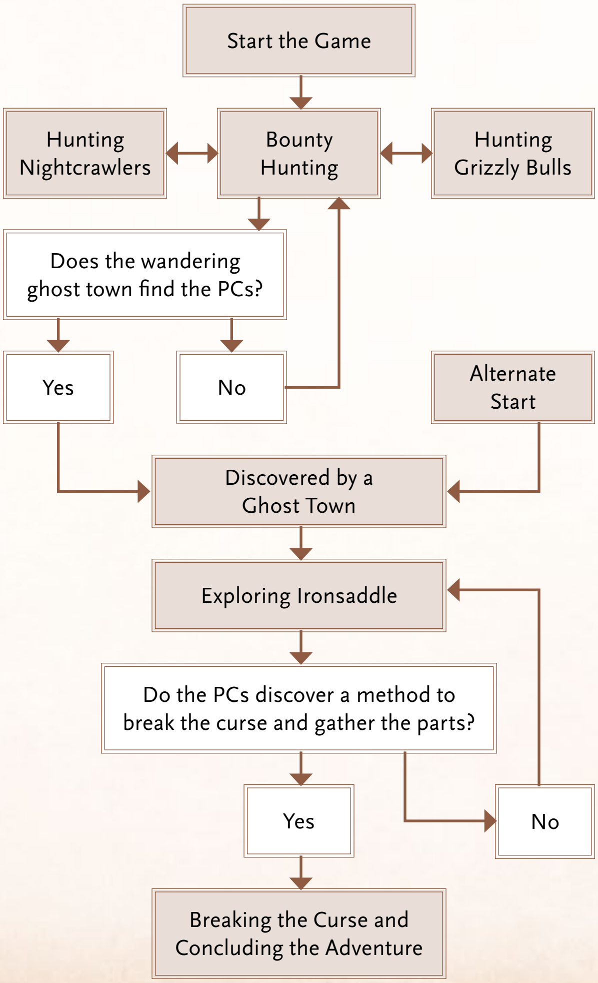
Start the Game: Bring the players up to speed on the weird west setting, the characters they'll be playing, and their starting situation.

Bounty Hunting: The PCs need cash, and they are on a hunt to collect the bounties offered for various cursed beasts that trouble the land. (But see the alternate start option.)

Discovered by a Ghost Town: The wandering ghost town of Ironsaddle "finds" the PCs at some point, possibly just in time to save them from a quetzalsaur attack.

Exploring Ironsaddle: By talking to a series of ghosts in Ironsaddle and piecing together clues, the PCs gradually learn that they've also become caught in the town's curse. Breaking the curse requires determining what caused it, then acting to reverse it. As PCs eventually discover, removing the curse is chiefly accomplished by recovering four trophies (each taken from an ancient statue-shaped relic) secreted around a town full of ghosts and other horrors.

Breaking the Curse: When the pieces are restored to the ancient relic (known as a jade walker) in the town square, and the proper ritual is performed under adverse conditions, the curse is broken. Afterward, the PCs are free again, possibly enriched enough by their time in Ironsaddle that they no longer need to hunt bounties.


Start the Game
Hunting Nightcrawlers
Bounty Hunting
Hunting Grizzly Bulls
Does the wandering ghost town find the PCs?
Yes
No
Alternate Start
Discovered by a Ghost Town
Exploring Ironsaddle
Do the PCs discover a method to break the curse and gather the parts?
Yes
No
Breaking the Curse and Concluding the Adventure

START THE GAME

Saddle up, it's time to ride.

WEIRD WEST SETTING AND CHARACTERS

"Ghosts of Ironsaddle" is designed to be run with relatively little preparation, without a lot of previous player knowledge about the setting.

WEIRD WEST SETTING GENERALITIES

The weird west setting containing "Ghosts of Ironsaddle" combines themes of western novels and movies with supernatural, fantasy, and science fiction. The resulting world is a place where PC gunslingers, cowpokes, primitive self-willed robots (called forgeborn), and lawmen confront cryptids, wield magic, and possibly encounter unexpected technology and mystic secrets. Additionally, unlike how history actually played out in our timeline, most promises and treaties made with native peoples were actually kept.

If you have a favorite weird west setting, you could use that, and adapt the specific lore of the adventure as needed.

Otherwise, simply tell your players that the game is set in an alternate Wild West where demons, ghosts, and even more unsettling threats are real.

JUMP INTO THINGS QUICKLY WITH AN ALTERNATE START

If time is a concern for your game, such as if you're GMing the adventure at a convention, consider starting the game *in medias res*: tell the PCs they encountered a threat they decided was too much for them, so they fled. In this case, tell each PC they're down 5 points in a Pool of their choice, with either a pack of nightcrawlers or a quetzalsaur nipping at their mount's hooves as they ride. Which is when they are discovered by a ghost town.

CREATING WEIRD WEST CHARACTERS

You could use the *Cypher System Rulebook* to create appropriate weird west characters for your players, or direct them to do so. Some combination of historical, horror, and fairy tale genre advice mixed with a healthy dose of magic flavor (and possibly technology flavor for a steampunk approach) would be a good start. See Suggested Types for a Weird West Game for more ideas.

Historical, page 307
Horror, page 280
Fairy Tale, page 302
Magic Flavor, page 36
Technology Flavor, page 35

SUGGESTED TYPES FOR A WEIRD WEST GAME

Role	Type
Lawman	Speaker with combat flavor
Swindler	Explorer with stealth flavor
Gunslinger	Warrior
Gambler	Explorer with skills and knowledge flavor
Teacher	Speaker
Actor	Speaker with skills and knowledge flavor
Doctor	Explorer with skills and knowledge flavor
Scholar	Explorer with skills and knowledge flavor
Mesmerist	Adept
Alchemist	Adept with technology flavor
Prospector	Explorer with combat flavor

Or you could download pregenerated characters suitable for a "weird west" setting to save time and ensure maximum suitability with the adventure.

You can download pregenerated first-tier characters for this adventure at: https://mymcg.info/aitcs-pregens

Introductions: Ask the players to describe and introduce their characters. Encourage them to explain their characters' connections to each other as described under the Notes section of their character sheet (if you're using the pregenerated characters).

What PCs Know: The PCs are hunting cursed beasts, as described under Bounty Hunting.

Tracking the Nightcrawlers, page 10

Tracking the Grizzly Bull, page 11

Discovered by a Ghost Town, page 12

BOUNTY HUNTING

The adventure begins with the PCs about three days' ride into sparsely inhabited regions, on the lookout for cursed beasts, hoping to collect on cursed beast bounties. (If you'd prefer an alternate reason for the PCs' to be out and about and their subsequent encounter with the ghost town of Ironsaddle, update the situation according to your game's circumstances.)

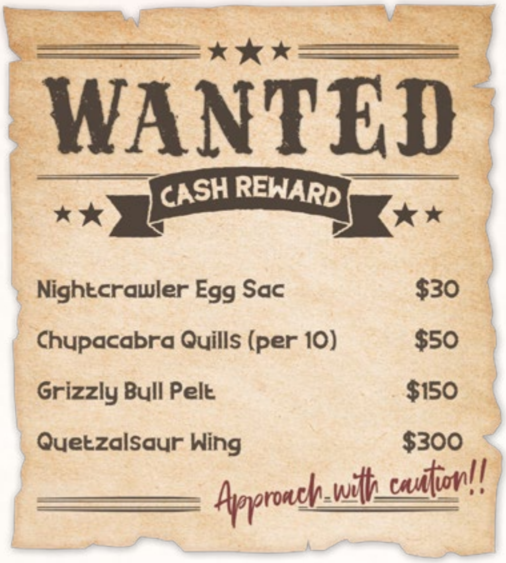
Cursed Beasts: Cursed beasts are a fusion of two or more different beasts stitched together with dire sorcery, or creatures that time would've been better off forgetting. Sometimes called "cryptids" by alchemists, cursed beasts include chupacabras, jackalopes, grizzly bulls, deathtumblers, quetzalsaurs, and nightcrawlers, among others.

"Alchemist" is a general term in the setting for people who use magic, especially for creating magical objects and substances for themselves or others.

Bounties Offered: Most western towns offer a bounty on cursed beasts, sometimes because their parts are useful to alchemists, but more often because cursed beasts are scourges and the fewer of them, the better.

However, the PCs have a deal with an alchemist named Huyen Reeves, who promised she'll pay the characters five times the standard bounty for chupacabra quills, nightcrawler egg sacs, grizzly bull pelts, and quetzalsaur wings.

Dry creek beds are also often called arroyos.



Nightcrawler Egg Sac	$30
Chupacabra Quills (per 10)	$50
Grizzly Bull Pelt	$150
Quetzalsaur Wing	$300

Standard Bounty	Reward (price category)
Nightcrawler egg sac	$30 (moderate)
Chupacabra quills (10)	$50 (moderate)
Grizzly bull pelt	$150 (expensive)
Quetzalsaur wing	$300 (expensive)

Tally So Far: The characters have successfully gathered the 10 chupacabra quills (from an air-mummified chupacabra corpse), which are carefully stored in a game bag.

Thanks to their deal with the alchemist who's agreed to pay extra, that's about $300 (one expensive item's worth of bounties). To pay off their various debts and/or satisfy their specific needs, they'll have to do much better.

Harsh Landscape: The dry creek bed beneath PCs' mounts is uneven, with sandy soil broken up by rocks and boulders. Scents of pine and warmed stone fill the air. To the north, rocky outcrops lead into a series of jagged, bleached badlands. A wide plain of scrub brush and rocky outcrops borders the PCs' route to the south. Ahead, the storm-wreathed heads of low mountains brood, but the weather in the arroyo is clear and dry.

WHAT PCs KNOW ABOUT CURSED BEASTS

If PCs ask what they know about any specific cursed beast, refer to the following.

Chupacabra: Part huge dog, part crocodile, and quilled like a porcupine. PCs found one as a mummified corpse and harvested what quills they could (see Tally So Far).

Grizzly Bulls: Rumored to be a bison magically crossed with a grizzly bear. Filled with demonic rage. No PC has seen one.

Nightcrawlers: These huge worms are a dozen or more feet (3.6 m) in length. They prey upon those sleeping rough or under scant shelter, pulling them down beneath the ground. No PC has seen one.

Quetzalsaur: Pulled out of time by cursed magic, this giraffe-sized flying monstrosity has an elongated, spike-shaped face and a 40-foot (12 m) wingspan. No PC has seen one, and they probably hope not to.

CHOICE OF CRYPTIDS

The PCs see a couple of potentially lucrative signs, either of which they could choose to pursue.

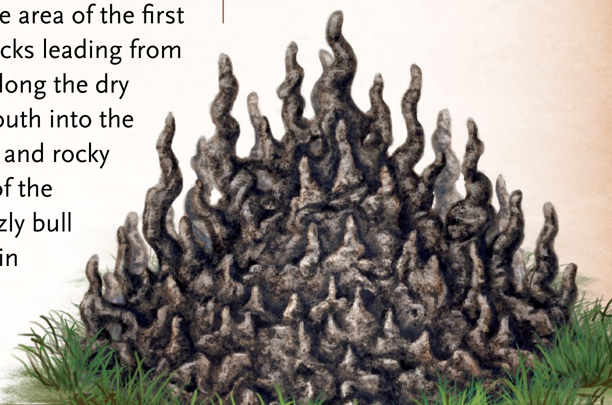
Nightcrawler Castings: Choose a PC; they notice something resembling a termite mound. Ask that character to make a difficulty 4 Intellect-based task for cryptid lore. A success means they realize the lumpy spire of tubular, compacted soil is probably a nightcrawler casting, given its large size—3 feet (1 m) tall—and its sulfuric odor. If PCs investigate directly, the find the texture is crumbly and airy, collapsing with a light touch. This reveals some partly digested animal bones mixed in with the rest.

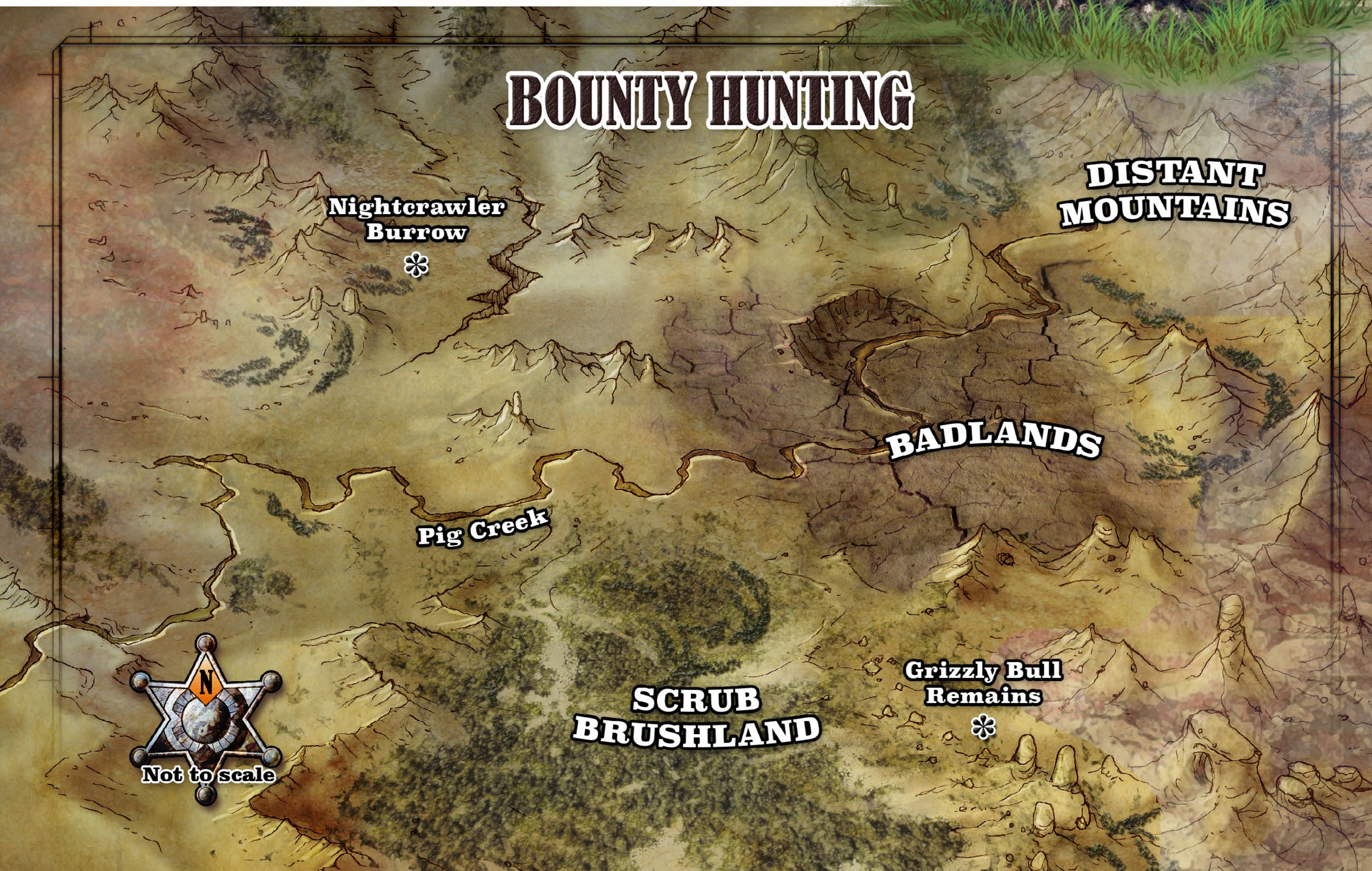
Following up, PCs discover that additional castings are visible to the north, popping up with more frequency in the canyons between the jagged, bleached badlands. Given the number of castings visible farther into the canyon, PCs suspect a whole clew of nightcrawlers (4–6 individuals) must have moved through the area recently.

Grizzly Bull Cow Patties: Choose a different PC than the one who notices the castings; this character finds a cow patty. Ask that character to make a difficulty 4 Intellect-based task for cryptid lore to realize the flat, oval mass of excrement might well be the dung of a grizzly bull: it's about twice the diameter of normal cattle droppings, has a particularly foul and musky odor, and fragments of fangs and teeth from past victims are mixed in.

GM intrusion: *The character finds a cow patty by accidentally stepping in it, hindering all social interactions "until the mess is cleaned up proper."*

A closer look around the area of the first cow patty reveals hoof tracks leading from somewhere further east along the dry river bed, then heading south into the wide plain of scrub brush and rocky outcrops. The freshness of the patty indicates that a grizzly bull was likely in the area within the last couple of days.





TRACKING THE NIGHTCRAWLERS

PCs could choose to hunt the nightcrawlers for their egg sacs.

Tracking the Crawlers to their Burrow: It's a routine task to track the crawlers into a canyon. The canyon sides rise about 50 feet (15 m) high on average, though sometimes much higher, and are topped by scraggly pines. The trail of castings peters out about a mile into the canyon, though the canyon continues. If PCs take a moment to look around, they notice a 3 1/2-foot (1 m) diameter tunnel on one canyon wall concealed by a thick growth of thistle.

Tunnel in the Canyon Wall: If PCs attempt to determine how recent the castings outside the tunnel are, a successful difficulty 4 Intellect-based task for cryptid lore reveals the freshest ones are probably from about a half-hour before sunrise.

If PCs decide to wait outside the tunnel in hopes of ambushing a nightcrawler, a couple emerge when twilight arrives, but they attempt to retreat back into their warren if attacked.

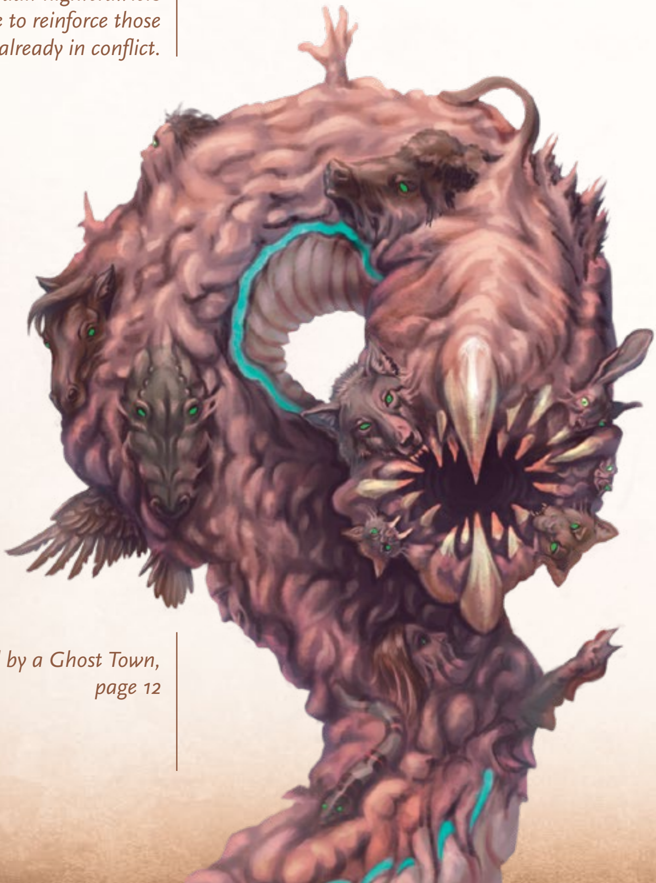
Nightcrawlers resemble 20-foot (6 m) long earthworms. Their skin is a stitchwork of hide stripped off past prey, all somehow still animate, but voiceless.

GM intrusion: *The bitten character is caught in the nightcrawler's mouth until they succeed on a Might task as their action to escape. Caught targets take damage automatically each round and their physical tasks are hindered (including their escape task).*

Nightcrawler young: *level 2*

Nightcrawler: *level 3; Armor 1; bites for 4 damage*

GM intrusion (group): *Two more adult nightcrawlers arrive to reinforce those already in conflict.*



Nightcrawler Warren: The narrow tunnel in the canyon wall descends steeply, curving downward some 40 feet (12 m) into pitch darkness. Human-sized creatures could crawl through single-file, but the narrow confines hinder all their physical tasks. If PCs have light or can see in the dark, they see the tunnel opens into a natural cave some 60 feet (18 m) in diameter. The floor is covered in loose soil redolent of sulfuric acid (it's made of collapsed castings). Besides the entrance tunnel leading from the canyon the PCs used, four other tunnels lead off toward other subterranean locations.

Warren Defense: At any one time, about four adult nightcrawlers rest in the warren, and (as a group GM intrusion) two more adults arrive to reinforce those already in conflict within a couple of rounds. Six voracious nightcrawler young are also present in the warren.

The nightcrawlers vigorously defend their warren, chasing after retreating PCs, or if the PCs prove the stronger, defending it to the death (though the last couple attempt to escape through side tunnels).

Exploring Nightcrawler Tunnels: If the PCs want to explore the warren's side tunnels (or they feel overwhelmed and need to flee in that direction, and/or you decide the time is right), the characters encounter the wandering ghost town of Ironsaddle in a subterranean vault about half a mile (800 m) deeper; see Discovered by a Ghost Town. Otherwise they don't find much, and eventually find other exits to the surface.

Discovered by a Ghost Town, page 12

Harvesting Nightcrawler Egg Sacs: PCs can harvest defeated nightcrawlers, cutting away the egg sac for each, after at least one character succeeds on a difficulty 4 Intellect-based cryptid lore task to identify the viscid thickened section of skin near the head (which alchemists call the "clitellum").

TRACKING THE GRIZZLY BULL

PCs could choose to hunt the grizzly bull for its pelt.

Tracking the Bull: It's a routine task to follow the occasional dollops of grizzly bull ordure into the scrubland. Thanks to the rocky outcroppings, some of which rise to mesa height, it's difficult to get good sightlines more than a couple of hundred yards in any direction.

Grizzly Bull Remains: The PCs round a patch of scrub and find a flock of vultures feeding on a large corpse. Any disturbance causes them to disengage, revealing a mauled grizzly bull corpse. It's sort of hard to tell exactly what it looked like before, but it has bear fur and bull horns.

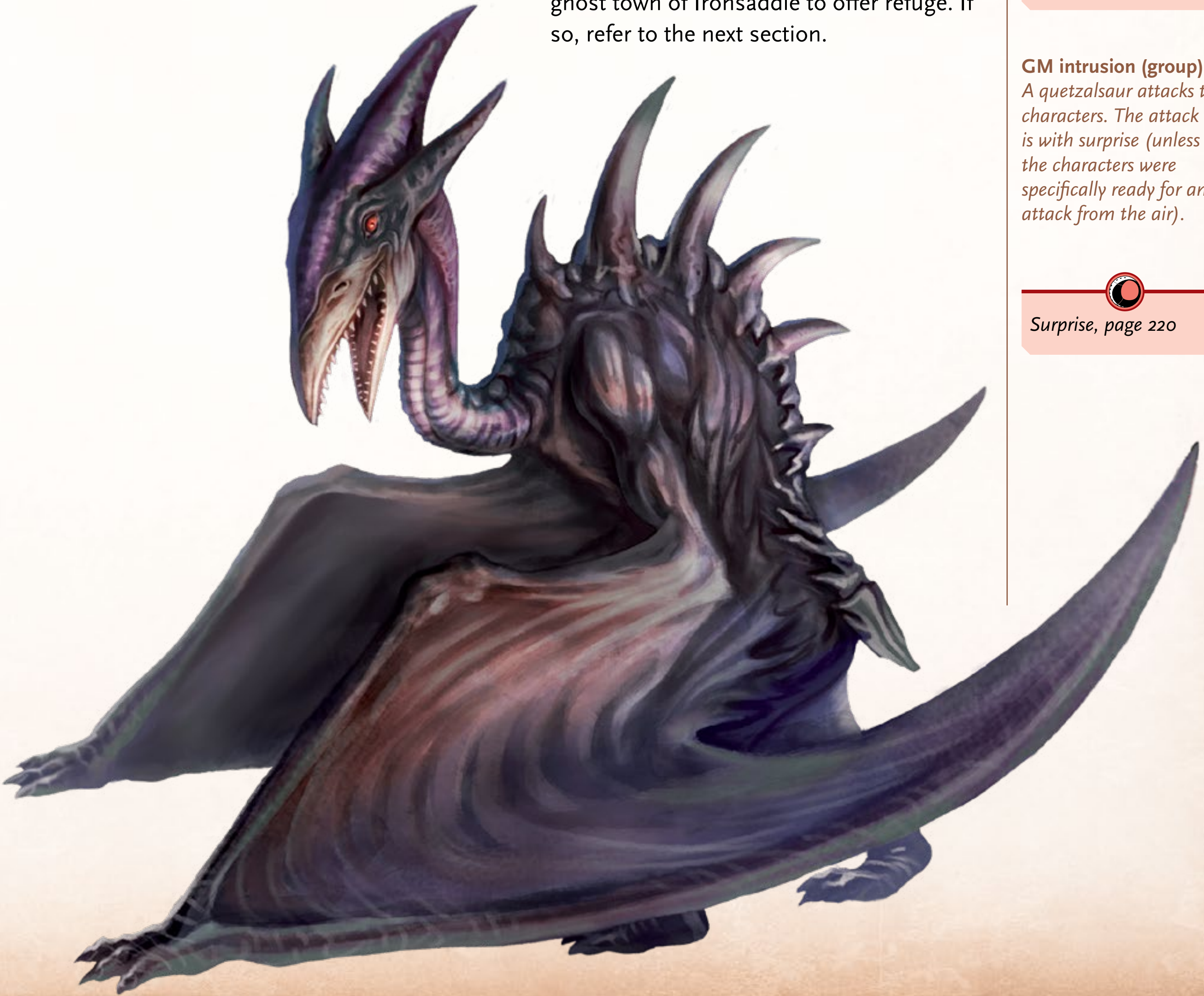
Something has very obviously ripped the head and one leg off the corpse; both are nearby. The pelt is damaged, but PCs think they might be able to harvest it in return for at least a portion of the bounty.

Quetzalsaur Attack: The characters wondering what predator was mean enough to take down a grizzly bull soon get their answer. The shadow of something huge briefly blocks the sun as a giant flying beast—a quetzalsaur—attacks from the air.

This giraffe-sized flying monstrosity has an elongated, spike-shaped face and a 40-foot (12 m) wingspan.

Fighting the Quetzalsaur: A quetzalsaur is a dangerous opponent, especially if the PCs were taken off guard. PCs may still gain the upper hand. If so, they could conceivably harvest two wings for the bounty.

However, PCs could legitimately believe they're outmatched, and begin questioning whether or not they should flee, in which case it's an ideal time for the wandering ghost town of Ironsaddle to offer refuge. If so, refer to the next section.



Quetzalsaur: *level 6, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; health 33; Armor 2; beak attack deals 7 damage*

GM intrusion (group): *The quetzalsaur uses its action to vomit up a mass of fur, bones, feathers, and metal from previous meals that animates as two separate zombies that defend the quetzalsaur.*

Zombie, page 371

GM intrusion (group): *A quetzalsaur attacks the characters. The attack is with surprise (unless the characters were specifically ready for an attack from the air).*

Surprise, page 220

DISCOVERED BY A GHOST TOWN

Whenever you think it's appropriate, PCs notice the edge of a small western town within short range. Triggering events could include one of the following:

Nightcrawlers, page 10

- *Subterranean Vault:* After defeating the nightcrawlers, PCs may decide to explore the other tunnels. If they spend an hour or more looking, they find the wandering ghost town in a massive subterranean vault.
- *Seeking Refuge:* If the PCs audibly express concern they might not survive a quetzalsaur attack or a horde of pursuing nightcrawlers, a round later they notice a western town at the end of a canyon, around an arroyo, or otherwise where no one previously noticed it.
- *Following Old Stories:* One of the characters (F. Thayer, if using the pregenerated characters) is putting together a guidebook about haunted places across the land. They've heard that a ghost town might be in the area, sometimes there, sometimes not. They have just enough knowledge and luck to lead the PCs farther down the dry creek bed they were first following to a distant playa where the town eventually appears.

An arroyo is a steep-sided gully formed by fast-flowing water in an arid or semi-arid region.

A playa is an area of flat, dry land, especially a desert basin where water evaporates quickly.

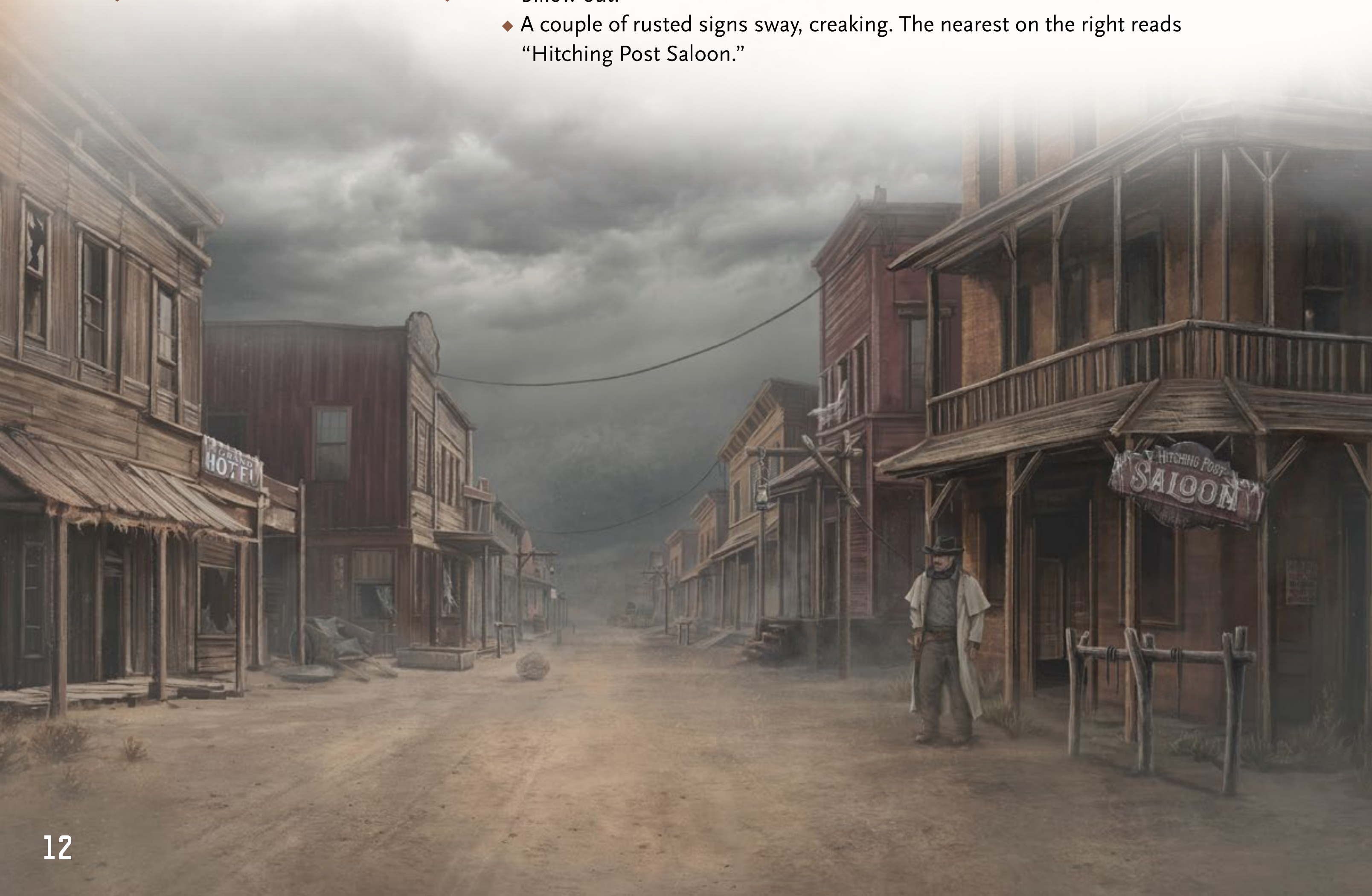
GRADUALLY PIECING TOGETHER CLUES

Rather than learning the situation in Ironsaddle all at once from one ghostly NPC, the PCs should gradually learn what's going on in Ironsaddle by piecing together clues gained by talking to a series of ghosts in the lifeless town.

ENTERING IRONSADDLE

If PCs enter the wandering ghost town, or even just interact with one of its residents at the edge, they feel a sudden dip in the ambient temperature, and if any character is especially sensitive to magic or ghosts, an additional supernatural tingle. They probably don't realize they're trapped in the town's curse until someone in town tells them and/or they try to leave and discover they can't.

- Weathered wooden buildings, paint peeling, border dusty streets down which a lone tumbleweed rolls.
- The wind sighs through broken windows. Here and there, ratty curtains billow out.
- A couple of rusted signs sway, creaking. The nearest on the right reads "Hitching Post Saloon."



Silas Hollister: A shadowed figure near the Hitching Post Saloon at the edge of town appears suddenly, waving the characters over. The figure wears a colorless duster and wide-brimmed Stetson, and sports an impressive handlebar mustache. Two six-shooters are holstered on matching gun belts.

This is Silas Hollister, one of several unwilling residents of Ironsaddle.

Silas's Greeting: Silas welcomes the PCs to town. But he's stingy with what he shares before he fades again. Work the following into any conversation the PCs attempt to have with him.

- "Howdy there, strangers. You fixin' to rob the bank?" (He laughs, as if at a hilarious joke.)
- "This here's Ironsaddle. You're the first living folk we've seen in some time."
- "Word to the wise: stay clear of Obadiah and the things he hunts."

Fades Away: Then Silas fades to nothing. PCs must look elsewhere for more clues.

A few rounds after Silas fades, while the PCs are considering their next move, they hear faint piano music from the nearby saloon. They can choose to investigate or ignore it; the sound fades after a few rounds.

Inescapable Town: Everything outside the town's borders appears somehow blurred, not quite able to be resolved, as if PCs have some dust in their eyes.

If PCs try to leave Ironsaddle, they discover that they can't escape. They get turned around and bounced back into Ironsaddle, always exactly where they first came to town (near Silas and the Hitching Post Saloon), regardless of which direction they strike out of town from.

Silas Hollister (ghost): *level 3; takes only 1 damage from mundane attacks; if destroyed, reforms within a few days*

WHAT PCs KNOW ABOUT IRONSADDLE

At least one of the characters have heard the legend of Ironsaddle, the town that disappeared 20 years earlier without a trace. Since then, folks hereabouts sometimes see it in the distance, never in the same place twice. Ironsaddle was once a boomtown, located perilously close to several proscribed zones (see below). But gold and silver drew prospectors, and Ironsaddle was born.

Five years after it was founded, it disappeared. No one outside the town knows why.

THE ILU AND PROSCRIBED ZONES

Most PCs know that proscribed zones are areas where Ilu ruins are found. No one really knows anything about who the Ilu were, only that they were very advanced and disappeared thousands of years ago. No one, not even native peoples who first found and classified those places as proscribed, knows the reason the Ilu left, only that it's better to stay away from the places they once lived.

EXPLORING IRONSADDLE

Ghosts in Ironsaddle are not mobile. Nor are they usually manifest. If PCs enter a given building or area, ghosts may fade into view, as noted under specific entry descriptions. But they normally remain quiescent, as is the case for most buildings that don't appear on the legend. If you're interested in expanding this adventure, you can change these details.

Otherwise keep things moving by not asking the PCs to explore every structure. Rather, skip forward by saying "you search a couple of buildings without finding anything," until the PCs come to a keyed building or area containing something out of the ordinary. Of course, PCs may simply follow leads from building to building, such as into the Hitching Post Saloon where they hear piano music, the Silver Slipper where a ghost tells PCs that Obadiah can be found, and so on.

1. Hitching Post Saloon

This building is right on the edge of town.

- A rusted sign "Hitching Post Saloon" swings out front.
- A snatch of piano is audible from inside playing a half-familiar bar tune, which fades soon enough.
- Prominent swinging saloon "batwing" doors provide the easiest entrance.

Something Bad Happened Inside: Denuded skeletons lie scattered about inside, slumped at tables and lying on the floor. (It's almost as if the patrons' flesh was eaten so quickly that their bones just fell where they'd been standing or sitting.)

The bar is dilapidated, and no bottles on the back shelf retain whisky or other spirits. Reddish fungus dots the walls and ceiling. The piano along one wall is half smashed, a skeleton draped over the bench.

All is quiet, thick with dust. If PCs investigate the room, they encounter the barkeep, Lavinia.

Lavinia Pruitt: The ghost of a barkeep fades into view behind the saloon bar a round or so after PCs enter, wearing a bar apron, and asks what the PCs are having. This is Lavinia Pruitt.

- "What'll it be?"
- If PCs order, Lavinia grabs what appears to be a real, whole bottle from the shelf, pours the drink into a shot glass, and one for herself, too, downing it in one gulp.
- But the bottles and drinks she serves PCs are "ghost matter," and the PCs can't interact with either.

Help for Help: Lavinia is surprised when she realizes the PCs aren't ghosts. She has a tale she's willing to tell the PCs regarding the situation in town, but she wants something in return.

- "My bones are back here, behind the bar, all tumbled. Will you gather and tidy them up? And put them in my box of keepsakes?"
- "I kept my keepsakes behind a panel in the pantry shack out back, opposite side of the alley. But I can't leave the bar, nor touch the real." (No ghost in Ironsaddle can move far from where they died.)

SPEAK WITH THE DEAD

If a character uses an ability to magically question a spirit, most ghosts will impart their information. In fact, PCs who ask exactly the right questions might get the ghost to reveal something the ghost would normally only reveal after the PCs do some task for them, calm them, or otherwise placate them. However, PCs using this ability to get around helping the ghost risk angering them, hindering further interaction tasks.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION NPCs MIGHT REVEAL

An NPC ghost the PCs meet in Ironsaddle—such as Lavinia, Jake Garfield the Grand Hotel manager, Obadiah, Annie Loomis, and Arlo Kent the bank manager—might relate one or two of the following points, usually as part of a conversation, in addition to what is specifically presented.

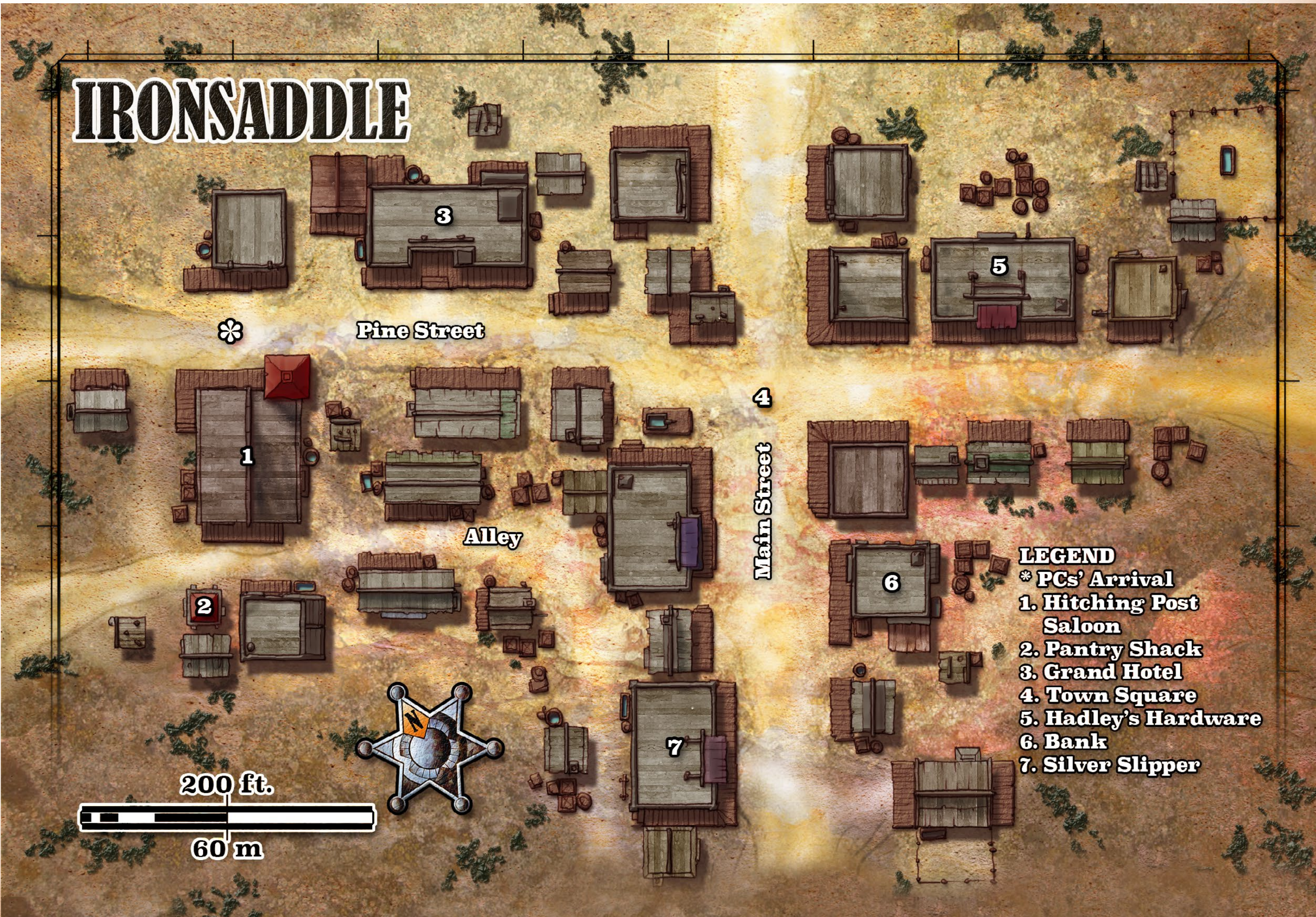
- "Ironsaddle ain't tethered to one place anymore; it wanders."
- "Every so often, strangers come to town. Later, they wish they hadn't, because they're caught, same as the rest of us. Same as you."
- "As ghosts, we're stuck in the place where we starved. Or where a thing ate us."

Lavinia's Tale: If the PCs gather Lavinia's bones (which are indeed behind the bar), add them to the keepsake box (in 2. Pantry Shack), and return with the job done (she doesn't care where the box ends up, so long as it's not damaged), Lavinia fades back into existence, and is well pleased. She relates the following in regard to her opinions about the situation.

- If PCs ask about the jade necklace found in her box: "A prospector who was sweet on me, name of Edwina—or was it Winona?—gave it to me. I stashed it with my other valuables. That was right before everything went bad." (Lavinia is happy to let the PCs have the necklace if they want it; she didn't have time to grow attached.)
- "It wasn't more than a couple days after a stagecoach came into town with some suspicious strangers aboard when a curse came to Ironsaddle. Two folks in particular raised the hair on my neck just looking at them."
- "One was an alchemist, name of Annie Loomis. She was staying across the street, at the Grand Hotel. She only came in here a few times and always asked for wine. Does this look like the kind of place that serves wine?"
- "The other was a gunslinger called Obadiah. He smelled off, and didn't talk. He never darkened my door, thank the saints. Folks said he spent his days at the Silver Slipper. That'd be the brothel southeast of here."
- "Last thing I remember when I was alive: this shapeless pile of bubbles blew in off the street and ate all my customers in less time than it takes for me to tell. I hid behind the bar. I survived. Until I didn't."

Lavinia Pruitt (ghost): *level 2, detecting lies as level 4; takes only 1 damage from mundane attacks; if destroyed, reforms within a few days*

Silver Slipper, page 22


IRONSADDLE
3
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LEGEND
* PCs' Arrival
1. Hitching Post Saloon
2. Pantry Shack
3. Grand Hotel
4. Town Square
5. Hadley's Hardware
6. Bank
7. Silver Slipper

2. Pantry Shack

This cramped building is missing one wall. Despite that, a hand-painted sign reads KEEP OUT!

Mess Inside: Opened cans and shattered, empty jars are everywhere; a few spill out into the alley. The place has been previously ransacked, probably many times. (The pantry was looted by Ironsaddle residents who survived the initial invasion of things, until nothing was left to eat, here or anywhere.)

Hieroglyphs consist of symbols that include pictograms and ideograms, and those used by the Ilu are notoriously hard to translate, even with magic; meanings shift and change with each attempt. PCs who try to sense magic do get the sense that the necklace is tied to something larger, maybe part of a larger set.

Searching the Pantry Shack: If PCs spend a few minutes searching through the empty cans and shattered glass jars of once persevered food and succeed on a difficulty 3 perception task, they discover a large, lacquered box partly buried in the morass.

PCs also find one whole bottle of top-shelf whisky (equal in value to an expensive item).

Price Categories, page 202

Insidious Thing Attack: When the lacquered box is pulled free and its contents are investigated, one character is targeted (introduce as a GM intrusion) by an insidious thing: a horrifying mass of writhing, slapping, undulating tentacles twice the size of a person, which seeps up out of the earth and attacks.

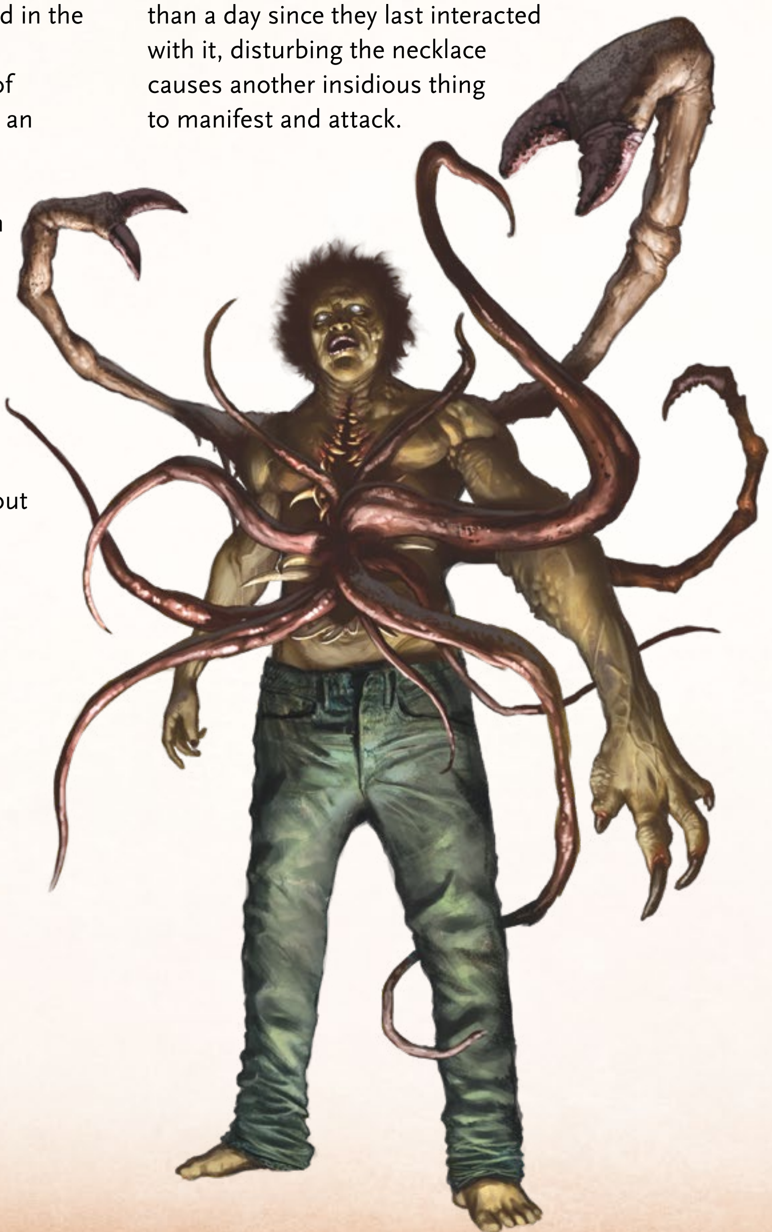
***Insidious Thing:** level 4; health 18; attacks with toothed tentacles that deal 5 damage; where damaged, target's skin discolored for several weeks*

Lacquered Box Contents: The box is big enough for Lavinia's bones. It also contains some fine clothing and shoes; a deck of cards (worth about 10—moderate); a gold ring (worth about 150—expensive); a faded black and white photo of Lavinia, another woman, and a child; and a jade necklace cut with intricate hieroglyphs (looks exotic, probably an expensive item).

Jade Necklace: The insidious thing's manifestation was triggered by the jade necklace being disturbed when the box was opened, but—if this is their first encounter with these items—the PCs probably have no way of knowing that. Assuming they don't take the necklace with them and later learn about how to break the curse, they'll have to come back for it. If it's been more than a day since they last interacted with it, disturbing the necklace causes another insidious thing to manifest and attack.

THING PARTS

As bounty hunters, PCs might express interest in harvesting pieces of the things they dispatch in Ironsaddle for later resale. Though generally not appreciated, the dangers that stalk proscribed lands would certainly be considered a threat if they were to escape. So PCs who harvest something from a monster defeated in Ironsaddle (a tentacle, an eye, a horrific organ, etc.) could later conceivably convince those paying bounties on cursed beasts that proof of each thing defeated is worth an expensive bounty ($150).



3. Grand Hotel

This building is on the opposite side of the street from the saloon.

- Paint peels from this three-story wooden structure.
- Hotel's façade adorned with scored and rotted wooden carvings.
- Hotel's wide veranda is half collapsed; doors hang open.

Lobby of the Grand Hotel: This central chamber is three stories high, surrounded by sagging balconies that look down on rotted divans, faded carpets, and dust. The reception desk is cracked, and the key hooks hanging behind the counter are mostly bare.

The front desk is covered in cobwebs, but the front desk bell is still visible.

Jake Garfield: The ghost of a hotel clerk in blood-stained finery and with a missing arm fades into view, and promptly screams in terror. This is Jake Garfield, who relives his last moments alive each time he manifests. By the way he screams and cowers, it is a horrific memory. He ignores the PCs, unless they physically move to touch (mostly ineffectively) his incorporeal form.

Calming Jake Down: When Jake manifests, he repeatedly screams some variation of "Help me. HELP ME! Nooooo!" and struggles against some unseen foe that gradually bites off more and more of his body until he fades away again after about a minute.

One way PCs can "restart" this ghostly reenactment is by dinging the front desk bell.

Calming Jake down so that he recognizes that he's no longer being attacked requires a difficulty 4 persuasion task. Each time the PCs fail a task, the ghost strikes out blindly and attacks the nearest PC, screaming "Get away from me!" PCs can retry calming Jake down but must expend Effort each additional attempt.

Another way they can calm him down is to use an ability to speak with the dead. (Jake's remains lie in a horrific, desiccated heap behind the front desk; they're the parts of him that some long-gone monster didn't eat.)

If calmed down (or if a PC uses an ability to speak with dead spirits), Jake responds to questions as follows.

- "I always fall back into remembering when the monsters ate me . . . "
- If PCs ask how they can help him: "Get rid of the monsters!"
- If asked about Annie Loomis: "Yes. She had a room here. Spent most of her time in the town square. I heard she was fascinated with Old Tex's statue."
- "The statue? Old Tex found it and had it hauled into town. Carved of green stone, looked like a man, but twice the size. Tex planted it right in the town square for folks to gawk at."

Annie Loomis's Room 209: If PCs ask, Jake confirms that Annie Loomis had a room at the Grand Hotel: Room 209. He points them to a skeleton key under his desk.

If PCs just search the hotel, it takes some time, given that the hotel is three stories. But if PCs are persistent, they eventually find Room 209.

Room 209 isn't locked. PCs find a dilapidated chamber with few amenities besides a bed, a rickety writing table and chair, and a wash basin.

The thing that stands out in this room is a purple and white striped cloak, which is actually a magical artifact: an alchemist cloak. (If PCs encounter Annie Loomis's ghost, they see she wears a phantom version of this cloak.) If a character has abilities that allow them to speak with the dead, they could use the cloak to ask her spirit a few questions, even though her spirit is bound to the town square.

Jake Garfield (ghost): *level 4; takes only 1 damage from mundane attacks; life-draining incorporeal touch deals 4 damage (ignores Armor); if destroyed, reforms within a few days*

Alchemist Cloak (level 4 artifact): *When activated as the user's action, the purple stripes glow faintly and for the next ten minutes, any creature that attacks the wearer takes 4 damage from "invisible flame." Depletion: 1 in 1d20*

Town Square, page 19

Hidden Hollow in Annie's Room: If PCs search Annie's room and succeed on a difficulty 4 perception task (eased three steps if Annie Loomis has told them where to look), PCs find a hollow in the wall under the wash basin. Inside the hollow is a leather satchel.

Devouring Thing Attack: As the leather satchel is pulled free and its contents investigated, one character is targeted (introduce as a GM intrusion) by a devouring thing, a lump of six or seven half-fused human bodies (overall easily twice human size) moaning, gurgling, that crashes in through the wall from the adjoining room.

Devouring thing: *level 4; health 21; attacks with acid-dripping limbs that wrap around target on a hit; grabbed target takes 4 damage each round until they escape*

Leather Satchel: Stitched with random alchemical runes, the satchel contains a journal, a handful of charms and trinkets, and a jade hand about twice the size of a human hand.

Charms and Trinkets: If PCs need to refresh their cyphers, they can do so from this stash. Possibilities include:

- *Monocle:* level 3; for one hour, PC's perception tasks are eased by two steps.
- *Flask of Fight*: level 5; for one hour, PC who fails a Might defense roll can attempt a second roll against that task.
- *Brain Pills:* level 5; for one hour, deduction tasks are eased.

GM intrusion: *The acid from the thing's attack destroys a piece of the character's clothing or equipment. Alternatively, striking the creature with a melee attack means the acid does 4 damage to the attacker.*

Annie Loomis's Journal: Most of the journal is written in alchemical runes that, even if somehow translated, are mostly related to Annie Loomis's research into a creating a new kind of forgeborn with better moral character.

Some people call forgeborn "golems."

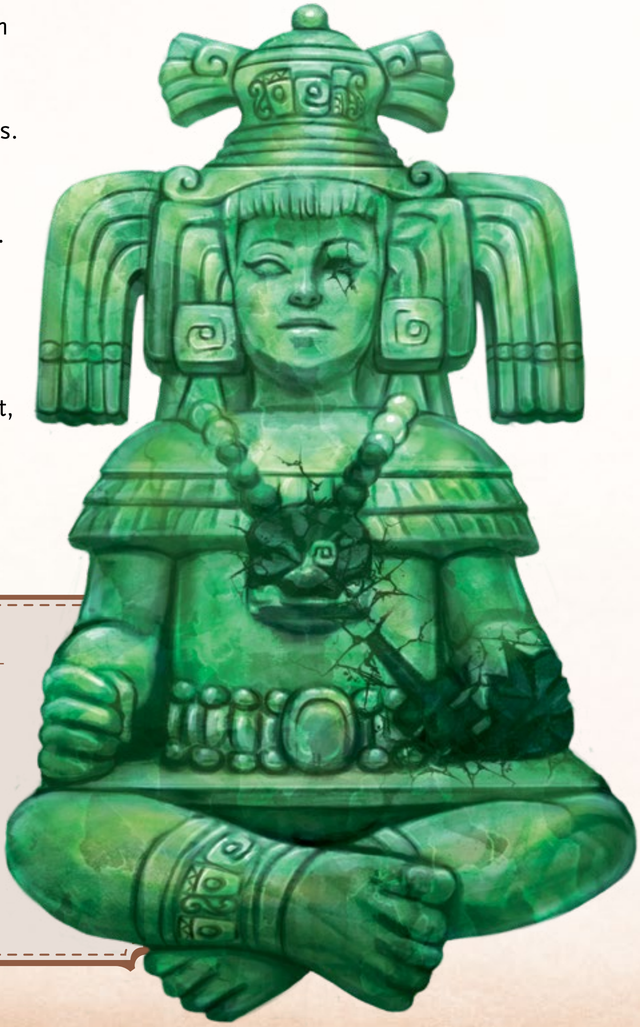
However, the last few pages, dated some 20 years earlier, relate to Annie's excitement over rumors of a "jade walker" being discovered in the town of Ironsaddle. She is excited because Ilu artifacts are far and few between, and no complete "animate warrior" has been previously found and studied.

The last sentence in the journal reads: "I have made arrangements to arrive in Ironsaddle in just a few days. Unfortunately, the price of such swift travel is that I must take Obadiah with me—I can't spare the time it would take to ward him in the cellar to keep him from killing everything he sees."

Jade Hand: The devouring thing's manifestation was triggered by the jade hand being disturbed when the satchel was opened. Once PCs move the hand, they have about a day before additional disturbances risk drawing more attention from the formless things that curse Ironsaddle.

HANDLING JADE ITEMS

As PCs learn during the course of this adventure, they'll have to acquire several jade items around town to break the curse afflicting Ironsaddle. Each time they do, a horrible creature attacks them. After the second or third time, they might realize this. If PCs take special precautions when obtaining the last item or two they acquire (such as handling the item super gently, using tongs or similar, etc.), reward them by not having a monstrous thing appear and attack.



4. Town Square

Two main streets converge here.

- A half-collapsed pavilion occupies the wide area at the center of town.
- A giant human statue covered in dust squats within the pavilion's ruins.

Jade Walker: Investigation of the figure in the pavilion reveals a huge humanoid statue sitting cross-legged. It'd probably be 12 feet (3.6 m) tall if it was standing. Hieroglyphs are densely etched into nearly every surface of the sculpture.

Those sensitive to the supernatural and/or magic sense some residual energy in the statue, but that power is in abeyance and can't be accessed.

A closer look at the statue reveals four pieces are missing, as follows. (The locations of the missing pieces are noted so you know where they are in Ironsaddle, but those locations aren't apparent to the PCs.)

- One eye (held by Obadiah)
- One hand (in Annie's room at the Grand Hotel)
- Rough groove that circles the statue's lower neck indicates something was taken (a necklace, in a keepsake box in the pantry shack)
- Groove running down side of hip indicates something was removed from a belt hanging at the statue's waist (a sword, in a bank deposit box in the Bank)

Annie Loomis: The ghost of an alchemist—wearing a vertically striped purple-and-white cloak and hood—fades into view once the PCs have had a chance to investigate the statue. This is Annie Loomis, who has been stuck in town with all the regular residents. She shakes her head at the PCs as if disappointed, and relays the following, some of which may be in response to PCs' questions.

- "Here to claim a trophy? Sure, how much worse could it get?"
- "Fucking prospectors, you're all the same."

If PCs want to her to answer more questions and Obadiah isn't with them, she shakes her head.

- "Fetch Obadiah for me first, and we'll talk. I died here, and I can't seem to leave this fucking town square."
- "Obadiah is my responsibility; he's got to be reined in. And he's got something I need—the eye." She points to the jade walker's gouged-out eye.
- If PCs ask where to find Obadiah: "Probably still at the Silver Slipper."

Eventually, she fades away again until PCs return with Obadiah. Or his remains.

If PCs come back to the town square with Obadiah (or he's already with them), Annie and Obadiah greet each other guardedly, then move off for some privacy for a few minutes. If PCs try to overhear, the two come to a grudging understanding and the beginnings of rapprochement (see Optional Reunion). After that, Annie is willing to talk with the PCs about dealing with the curse.

If PCs come to the town square with Obadiah's remains (or tales of having defeated him), she sighs sadly, but is also willing to talk with PCs about dealing with the curse.

- "This mysterious relic was dragged into town and set here, I suppose to drum up visitors. I heard about it all the way back East. A complete jade walker, never seen before. I got here soon as I could. When I arrived, the idiots were already carving off pieces for trophies and gifts. I secured a hand from a cowboy who shot it off the walker on a dare. So the damage was already done."
- "Jade walkers were weapons created for an ancient, secret war against primeval horrors thousands of years ago. When whole, they keep those inscrutable beings at bay. This one is no longer whole. See the problem?"
- "Being stuck on this phantom plane—it's given me time to ponder. I think I've worked out a way to lift the curse. If the stolen bits of statue are returned here, I can try a ritual to lift the curse. Only problem is, as a ghost I can't leave this town square to look for the trophies. Nor can I move corporeal objects."
- "I know where you might look for at least one piece, other than Obadiah's. I secured a jade hand in my room at the Grand Hotel, room 209."

Obadiah, page 22

Optional Reunion, page 23

Grand Hotel, page 17

Pantry Shack, page 16

Bank, page 21

Annie Loomis (ghost): *level 4; takes only 1 damage from mundane attacks; if destroyed, reforms within a few days*

Grizzly bull ghost: *level 4; moves through solid objects at will; freezing bite inflicts 4 damage (ignores Armor)*

Price Categories, page 202

5. Hadley's Hardware

This place was once frequented by prospectors and townsfolk.

- Gaping hole in the building's side
- Hand-lettered sign on the building's front reads HADLEY'S HARDWARE
- Mess of goods spill into the street from hole in building front: shovels, rock picks, gold pans, wire spindles, brooms, rope, casks, and more

Something Big Came In: The way the mess of goods from inside the hardware store is strewn out into the street suggests that something large dug its way into the side of the store.

Free Goods: Being cursed to exist in a phantom plane has had some preservative effects on the hardware scattered in the street and that still strewn inside the hardware store. If PCs are looking for the kind of things one might find in an old west hardware store, especially one catering to prospectors, they can find it here. Everything, that is, except for food. They can find a lot of empty tins that once stored beans and similar preserved foodstuffs.

Burrow in Hardware Store Floor: The hardware store floor is ripped up, revealing a 20-foot (6 m) diameter cavity below dug into the earth. Bones of some kind of large, clawed quadruped lie in the center of the cavity. The remains are curled protectively around a heap of goods scavenged from the hardware store above, though it's impossible to see exactly what without getting down into the burrow—a 10-foot (3 m) drop—and rooting around in the bones.

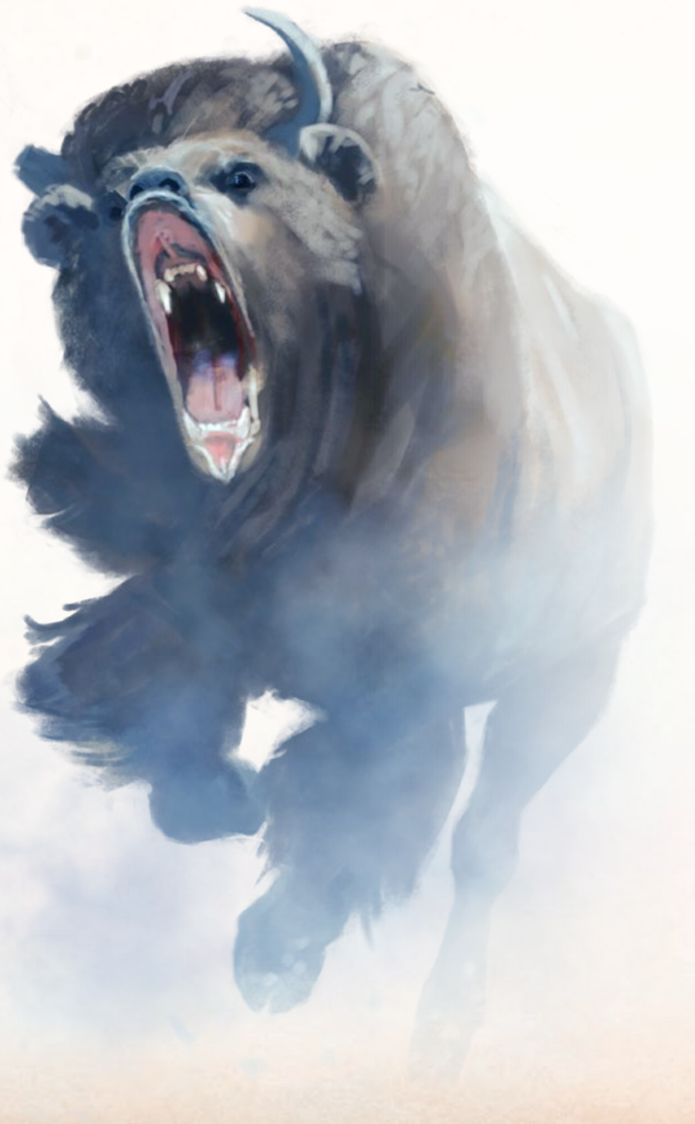
A closer look at the skeleton suggests perhaps two creatures died—a large bull and a grizzly bear—and their bones were combined. If the PCs found a grizzly bull corpse before entering Ironsaddle, they can see the similarities, and someone who succeeds on a difficulty 3 Intellect task for cryptid lore can be fairly certain the bones are those of a grizzly bull.

GM intrusion: *The grizzly bull ghost psychically emanates fear so intense that creatures in immediate range who fail an Intellect defense task take 4 Intellect damage (ignores Armor) and are terrified, freezing in place until they succeed on an Intellect-based task as their action.*

Don't Mess with the Bull: If the PCs disturb the remains, a grizzly bull ghost forms in the burrow and furiously attacks. The grizzly bull ghost can't move outside its burrow or the store above it, and if it tries, it fades and can't reform for one day.

If PCs drive off or evade the bull and later spend at least a minute scavenging through the goods the grizzly bull gathered before it starved, they find the following valuables:

- A handful of silver dollars (expensive)
- A couple of gold bars (very expensive)
- *Vial of Sustenance:* level 8 cypher; restores 8 points to the Pool of the user's choice
- *Handy Gloves:* level 5 cypher; provides an additional asset for any one task within one hour that uses a tool
- *Shiny Spurs:* level 6 cypher; for one minute, PC can move a long distance as their action (instead of a short distance)



6. Bank

Where townsfolk and prospectors once stored their wealth.

- The word "BANK" is etched into stone façade of this large building.
- The stone façade is stained green and mottled with strange fungus.
- The doors are smashed from their hinges and lie crumpled in the bank lobby.

Piles of Banknotes: Inside the bank, green banknotes are heaped across the floor in moldering piles. (The bank notes are issued by Ironsaddle Bank. To anyone outside of Ironsaddle, they are completely worthless.)

Bank Manager: A ghostly figure swirls into existence behind the high counter and metal cage protecting the teller stations along the back wall. This is Arlo Kent, the bank manager, though his figure doesn't seem like a translucent, pale version of his live self like other ghosts the PCs have interacted with; this figure is a swirling core of palpable malevolence. Arlo also wears a bank teller visor, a moth-eaten vest, and a frayed jacket.

- Arlo doesn't initiate hostilities, but violently responds if attacked. Otherwise he stands silent and staring, possibly waiting. He doesn't speak, but will respond with nods and gestures, and even help the PCs if they help him. To aid in communication, he'll use a bony finger to write on the air in cold steaming letters, forming single words or short phrases.
- Arlo keeps a short jade sword in one of the safe deposit boxes visible through the open safe door behind the teller station.
- Arlo is willing to hand over the sword if the PCs provide an equal value deposit in return. A very expensive item or sum is required, which could include something the PCs have, have found in Ironsaddle, or, if PCs think of it, banknotes gathered from the mounds littering the lobby; these notes have no value outside Ironsaddle, but Arlo is somewhat stuck in the past.

Acquiring the Jade Sword: If Arlo is given an object or objects equal to a very expensive item, he retreats into the open bank vault, reaches directly into one of the closed safe deposit boxes, and somehow pulls out the jade sword. (PCs would have to pick a safe deposit box lock without Arlo's help.)

A horrible tentacled thing arises if Arlo pulls the sword out, but with gleeful nonchalance, Arlo's wraith touch turns the thing to ash. (If PCs retrieve the sword themselves, they'll have to deal with an insidious thing that bubbles up out of the floor.)

Other Bank Safe Deposit Boxes: Most of the safe deposit boxes are open and empty. If PCs decide to devote the time and effort to pick the remaining 12 boxes, they discover about half contain personal correspondence that's worthless. The other half contain a combination of precious metals, land deeds, stock certificates, and other bits equal to five very expensive items.

If PCs started this adventure in order to raise funds for their various needs, this amount is likely enough to cover them. Of course, ending the curse so they can escape Ironsaddle is still required.

Safe deposit box lock: *level 6*

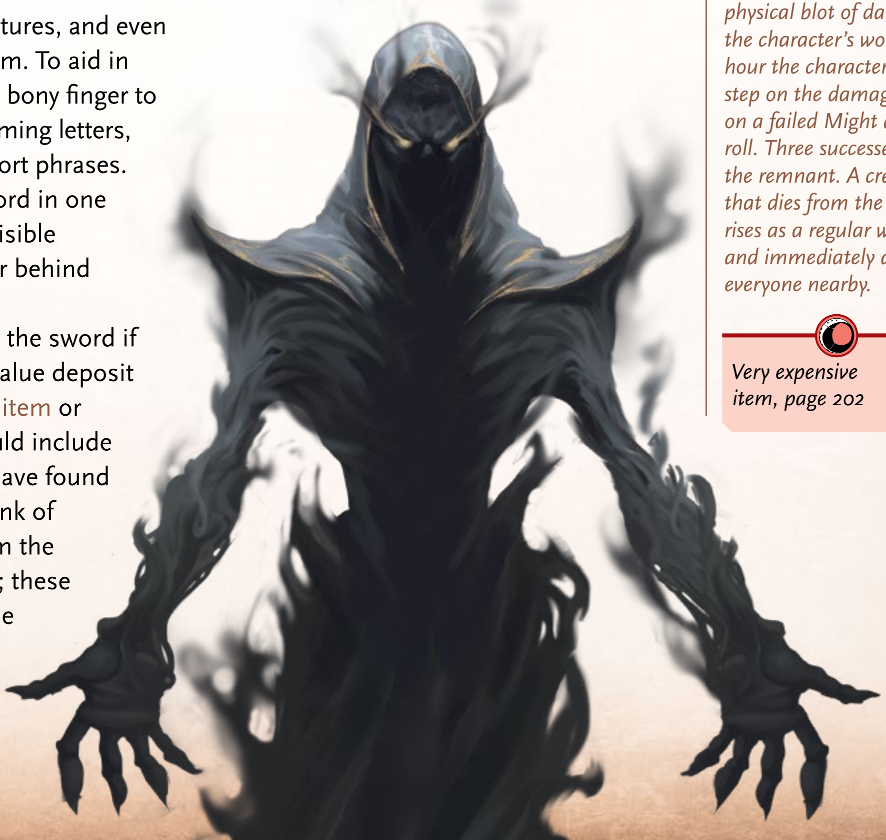
Insidious thing, page 16

Arlo Kent (wraith lord): *level 5; health 22; Armor 1; life-draining touch inflicts 5 Speed damage (ignores Armor)*

Wraith: *level 4; only takes 1 damage from mundane attacks; moves through solid objects at will; incorporeal touch inflicts 4 damage (ignores Armor)*

GM intrusion: *The wraith's attack leaves behind a physical blot of darkness in the character's wound. Each hour the character falls one step on the damage track on a failed Might defense roll. Three successes purges the remnant. A creature that dies from the wound rises as a regular wraith and immediately attacks everyone nearby.*

Very expensive item, page 202



7. Silver Slipper

A place where townsfolk and prospectors came for company.

- Placard on this two-story structure displays a glittering silver slipper.
- Uneven wooden steps leads up to a wide porch.
- Entrance door is quilted with red cloth.

The Silver Slipper was a brothel back before the curse.

Horrors Defeated on Display: Inside, the Silver Slipper's main "Sitting Room" is like a slaughterhouse.

Dead and preserved bodies of tentacled horrors, dried blobs, and skinned monstrosities hang from the wide balconies overlooking the main lobby, cover the once fancy furnishings filling the main lobby, and lie like cordwood along the walls and spilling out of side rooms.

Deadshot Polishing His Pistol: A huge human figure, easily 8 feet (2.5 m) tall in black boots, duster, and wide-brimmed hat, leans casually against one of the few unadorned walls in the lobby, polishing a long black pistol. A burlap mask hides the figure's face, but he seems aware of PCs who've openly entered the Silver Slipper.

This is Obadiah, a "modern" forgeborn—instead of metal and wood, he's made of parts of various previously deceased ne'er-do-well gunslingers, then animated by alchemy.

Obadiah (flesh forgeborn): *level 5, initiative as level 8; health 27; Armor 2; two long range pistol attacks deal 5 damage each*

If PCs want to talk, Obadiah is willing.

- "Well look-ee here."
- "No *new* live prey has appeared in town for a long time, until you strangers arrived."
- "I was pieced together from dead men who hanged for their sins. I served John Loomis the Watertown Warlock, and when he passed, I served his granddaughter Annie, until she passed in turn."
- "I'm free to hunt as I will. I've gotten passing fair at taking these things down. I call a new one up every few days using this." Obadiah pulls out a large jade eye from his duster pocket.

GM intrusion: *Obadiah fires a slug of necrotic flesh. The character hit with the bullet takes 5 damage and must succeed on a Might defense roll or take an additional 3 damage (ignores Armor) each round until someone spends an action extracting the bullet with a successful difficulty 4 healing task.*

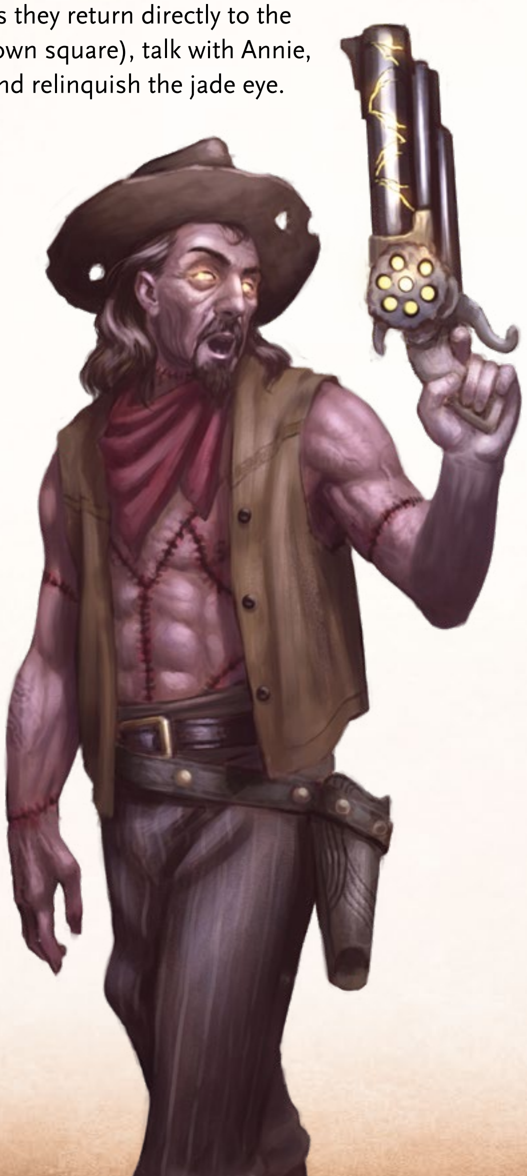
Sizing Up the PCs: As PCs talk to Obadiah, it becomes clear soon enough that he's taking their measure. If PCs wish to defuse the situation before he calls them out, ask a character for a persuasion task and some reason why the PCs shouldn't be considered prey. A successful difficulty 5 persuasion task does the trick. If PCs mention Annie in a positive way, their task is eased. A failure doesn't mean Obadiah attacks, and PCs could try again (though as usual, they must use Effort for retrying a task) with a different tack.

However, three failed persuasion tasks means it's going to be a fight.

Dealing Peacefully with Obadiah: If PCs convince Obadiah they're not prey, he's willing to talk further and provide help.

- "You know, I actually miss Annie. I . . . that surprises me."
- "I'm coming with you. I'll return this here eye to Annie personally. I'd like to set things right with her."

True this his word, Obadiah will accompany them (so long as they return directly to the town square), talk with Annie, and relinquish the jade eye.



BREAKING THE CURSE

If PCs retrieve all four jade pieces removed from the jade walker and take them to Annie, she can begin the ritual.

Optional Reunion: If Obadiah returns with the PCs to see Annie, the two move a bit apart to talk. PCs who strain can overhear their interaction.

Obadiah confesses, surprising himself as much as Annie, to missing her. He even apologizes for leaving her when his bond was severed. He says having been on his own for so long, having time to think for himself, he'd do it differently if he had it to do over again.

For her part, Annie is at first speechless, then decides to accept him at his word. She apologizes for having never really considered the possibility of him having the capacity to change, and of friendship. She laughs, and says "If a ghost can befriend a killer forgeborn, I reckon anything's possible."

Ritual Preparations: Annie asks the PCs to affix the returned statue pieces—the necklace, the sword, the eye, and the hand—to the jade walker. (PCs may suddenly recall seeing a loose tin of "Gentry's Fine Fish Glue" in the hardware store, if they ventured there; otherwise rope or twine could be used to bind the pieces back in place.)

Annie's Warning: Once the pieces are in place, she says "I don't *know* how the things this jade walker once contained will react when I try to restore their prison, but I can guess. Some of them are powerful enough that they can harm ghosts, which is why most ghosts of Ironsaddle don't manifest for long. If any show up, keep them off me while I perform the ritual. It shouldn't take more than a minute."

Beginning the Ritual: Annie begins chanting an alchemical formula ("Redi ad integritatem, redi ad animationem, recupera tuitum quod olim manifestavisti…" and so on) as she circles the statue clockwise.

The ritual requires 5 full rounds of chanting to succeed.

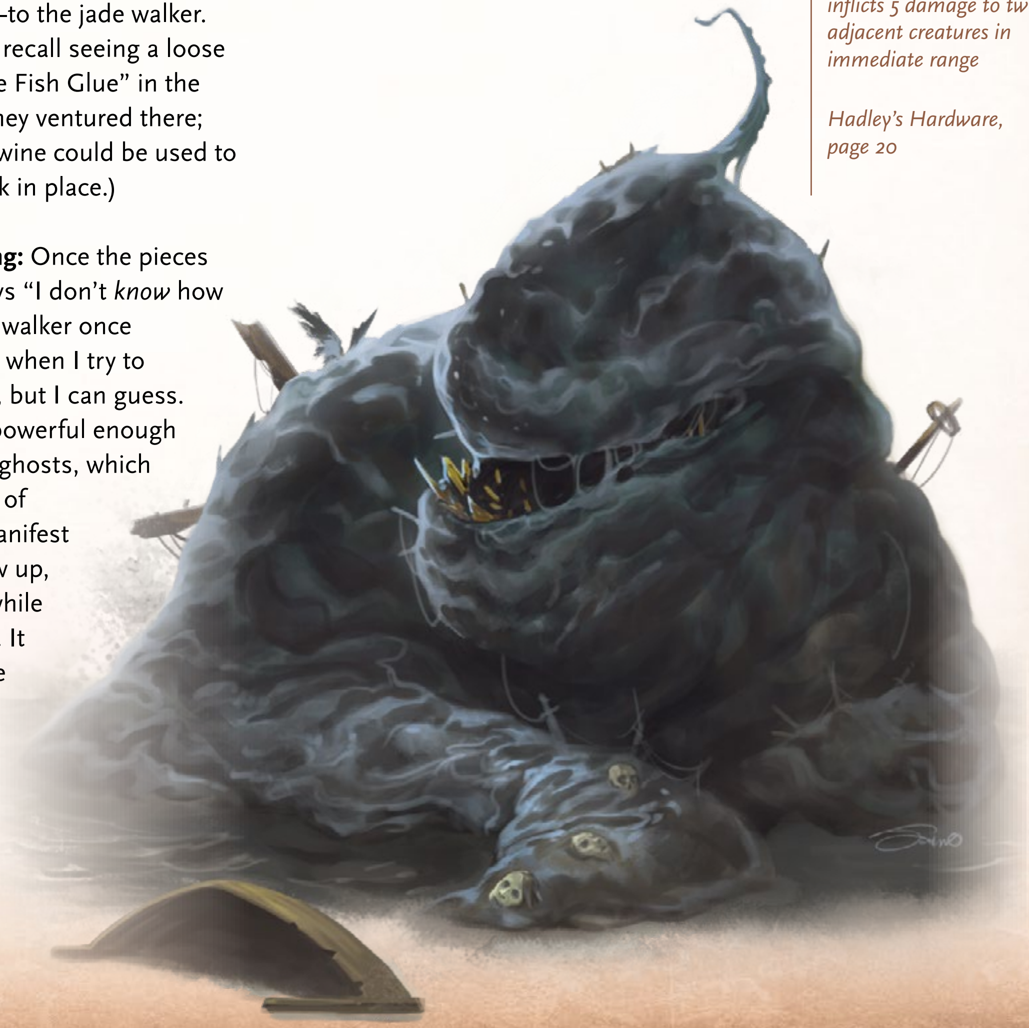
Attack on the Ritual: The ground rumbles and shakes. A sound like a breaking wave accompanies a watery thing's arrival, as it surges towards the town square from the northwest, along Main Street. It is a turbulent 17-foot (5 m) diameter creature that is equal parts water, mud, and the remains of dead marine creatures and drowned people.

This is an abysmal. It tries to get to Annie, but PCs can engage it each round to keep it distracted.

GM intrusion (group): *Even though the PCs engage the abysmal this round, it expels a portion of its substance over their heads, creating a servitor (level 3) composed of sludge, sea-life, and dead people that attacks Annie, automatically biting the ghost for 4 damage each round (and delaying the ritual another round) until it's stopped or she is consumed.*

Abysmal: *level 5, Speed defense as level 3 due to size; health 27 (regains 1 health each round), attacks with a full-body crashing wave that inflicts 5 damage to two adjacent creatures in immediate range*

Hadley's Hardware, page 20



Various factors that also could influence the fight include:

- If the PCs fail to engage the abysmal for a round (or it slips through an attack on Annie anyway), the ritual length must extend for a round. This is cumulative.
- If Obadiah is present, he can use his quickdraw reflexes to simultaneously provide a PC with an asset to their attack, and the same PC (or another PC within immediate range) an asset to their Speed defense. Alternatively, he could also sacrifice himself to keep the abysmal away from Annie for one full round.
- If a PC trained in magical lore wants to help Annie, they can also start circling and chanting each round as their action. Each round they succeed on a difficulty 5 magical lore (or similar) Intellect-based task, the length of time the ritual needs to succeed is reduced by one round. Only one PC can help Annie in this fashion at a time.
- If Annie is destroyed but the PCs survive, one or two of them could try to complete the ritual as described under the previous bullet.

GM intrusion: *An insidious thing appears under Annie's feet and attempts to eat her (and interrupts the ritual for at least a round).*

Insidious thing, page 16

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Assuming the PCs succeed in protecting Annie long enough to complete her ritual, they witness the following series of events.

Reeling In the Horrors: The statue pulses with jade light that extends outward in all directions to every part of town. The following round, a river of horrifying, screaming, protesting, dragged against-their will monsters are sucked bodily into the sitting statue, becoming immaterial and silent as they pass into its hieroglyph-etched skin. Finally, all is silent once more.

Annie, page 19

Riding Out: The reanimated jade walker stands to their full giant (12 feet–3.6 m) height, nods to the PCs, and walks northwest toward the edge of town. A spectral shape joins them, resembling a giant ground sloth twice as large as the walker. The walker mounts up on the sloth and rides away into the sunset, which is when PCs realize the ghost town of Ironsaddle has rejoined the real world.

Jade walker: *level 8*

Bank, page 21

Ghost Town No More: All the ghosts of Ironsaddle file out of town after the jade walker leaves, moving in all directions, slowly losing visibility and substance. If the PCs were friendly with any of the ghosts, such as Annie, they get a joyful grin and wave before they dissipate. Finally, the ghosts are free to find whatever ends they would've if their spirits hadn't been trapped in town.

Paying Off Debts and Such: If the PCs haven't already looted the bank, they can do so now, this time without having to fear interfering ghosts or damned things. In the safe deposit boxes they can find enough to pay off their debts and make themselves whole.

XP FOR CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Award each PC 3 XP for ending the curse of Ironsaddle, and 1 XP if Obadiah and Annie Loomis agreed to be friends.

CHAPTER 2:

GOING MAD

BY DOMINIQUE DICKEY

AN ADVENTURE SET IN

THE ORIGIN

CHAPTER 2

GOING MAD

USING THIS ADVENTURE

Throughout this adventure, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by these two symbols.

The first are page references to the *Cypher System Rulebook*, where you can find additional details about that rule, ability, creature, or concept.

The second are page references to *The Origin*, where you can find similar details. However, you can run the adventure without the setting book, so long as you have the *Cypher System Rulebook*.

You can download pregenerated first-tier characters for this adventure at: https://mymcg.info/aitcs-pregens

Modern, page 261

Power shift, page 292

Superheroes, page 289

MAD, page 47

"Going MAD" is a mystery adventure for three to five tier 1 characters, designed to be played as a one-shot or as the beginning of a longer campaign. Characters should be built using the *Cypher System Rulebook*. Though "Going MAD" takes place in the world of *The Origin* (a modern-day, superhero-adjacent setting), all necessary information to run this adventure is included here.

BACKGROUND

The setting for this adventure is a city you're familiar with, in a world very much like our own. Most people (including the PCs) think "superheroes" are fiction. And, of course, superheroes fighting crime in flashy costumes only exist in stories, even in the world of *The Origin*. But people with extraordinary abilities do exist in the shadows—and are hunted by the Metahuman Affairs Department (MAD)—as the PCs soon find out.

The PCs begin the adventure at a train station, where MAD rescues them from a "terrorist" attack. Though the PCs don't know it yet, they're metahumans: MAD wants to detain them, and a metahuman collective known as the Flock wants to recruit them.

THE CRASH: GM'S SETTING SUMMARY FOR *THE ORIGIN*

An interstellar object hit Earth in 2017 (an event called the Crash), setting the entire planet ablaze and obliterating all life. And then everything was normal again, and only a small percentage of people remembered the world ending, while everyone else remained oblivious in what is apparently a divergent timeline. Or was the timeline where the world ended the divergent one? It's unclear.

Those who remember the Crash are metahumans, developing abilities that defy reality and physics. They're also targets of MAD.

The PCs start as modern characters with no knowledge of the Crash or metahumans—but that suppressed memory is ready to surface, which is why MAD has been keeping an eye on them. When the PCs remember the Crash and develop their metahuman powers, the players update their character sheets accordingly. Each player gains three power shifts from the Superheroes genre. Players can choose a new descriptor, type, and focus; they keep their mundane focus, but cannot advance in it past tier 1.

METAHUMAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT (MAD)

MAD is a covert agency of the United States government. Like other agencies that thrive without any "official" existence, MAD is funded through misleading accounting, misdirection of seized funds, cryptocurrency mining and manipulation, and less palatable sources. Several conspiracy groups promulgate the existence of a governmental group charged with tracking down and covering up supernatural phenomena, but the fact that conspiracists are actually right is more luck than any departmental leak or disclosure. MAD runs a tight ship.

MAD's top-level directive is to protect the interests of the USA against metahuman terrorism, attacks, and espionage. To this end, it maintains a metahuman watch list. Every few days, more known and suspected metahumans are added to the list, kept on a secure database. Sooner or later a team of MAD field agents visits everyone on the watchlist.

SYNOPSIS

"Going MAD" is broken up as follows:

Getting the Characters Involved. This section provides advice on getting the characters ready for a train trip in a modern city—before chaos breaks out at the train station.

Station Fire. The train station is attacked by the metahuman known as Cardinal in what initially seems to be a bombing. In the chaos of the evacuation, the PCs are "rescued" by MAD operatives and transported to a safehouse. The characters learn that metahumans are real, and that they were the intended targets of Cardinal's attack.

Investigation. This series of encounters gives the PCs opportunities to look into what MAD truly does, and learn why Cardinal is so determined to take the agency down.

Joining the Flock/Becoming Metahuman. Cardinal and Kingfisher appear at the characters' safehouse, and the characters recall a terrible world-ending event, gaining superpowers in the process. The players update their character sheets to become tier 1 metahumans.

Operation Prison Break. Cardinal recruits the characters to help free her comrades from MAD detainment.

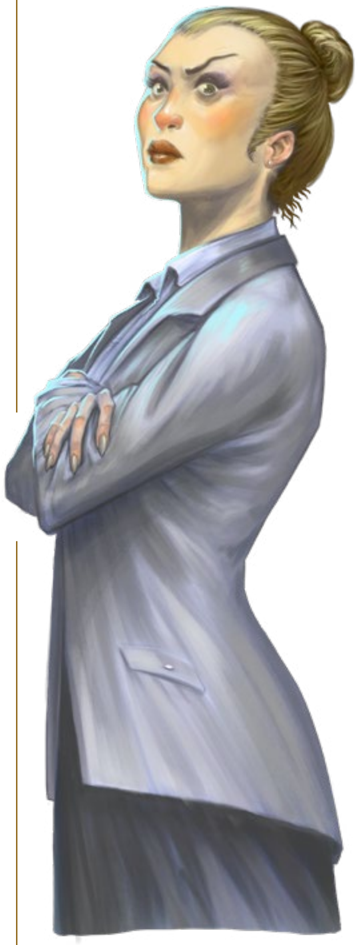
Concluding the Adventure. When the adventure is over, the PCs understand that metahumans are hunted by MAD—and they're now MAD targets. Going forward, they can choose to work with Cardinal as she continues to sabotage the intelligence agency.

CRITICAL NPCS

DEPUTY DIRECTOR ST. GEORGE

Justine St. George was one of MAD's first operatives and takes great pride in shaping the agency's trajectory. In addition to MAD's overall goal of preventing metahuman crime, St. George is looking for a way to use metahumans as an energy source. She oversees experiments on detained metahumans, but those experiments haven't gotten very far. She suspects the key to success is harnessing the volatility of a metahuman's initial power manifestation; as such, she's been keeping an eye on the PCs, ready to strike when their powers are most likely to develop.

Justine St. George: *level 3, persuasion and deception tasks as level 5*



AGENT MADISON

Tyrell Madison is new to Deputy Director St. George's personal service—he only recently learned the truth behind what MAD does, and isn't quite sure how he feels about it. Because information is siloed within the organization, he doesn't know that MAD has imprisoned members of the Flock (a metahuman collective that includes Cardinal), that St. George conducts experiments on metahumans, or that the PCs are metahumans. He's willing to ally with the PCs in their investigation, and can nudge the PCs towards Quicksilver Antiques if they seem reluctant to seek out answers on their own.

Tyrell Madison: *level 4; health 18; Armor 2; long-range pistol inflicts 5 damage*

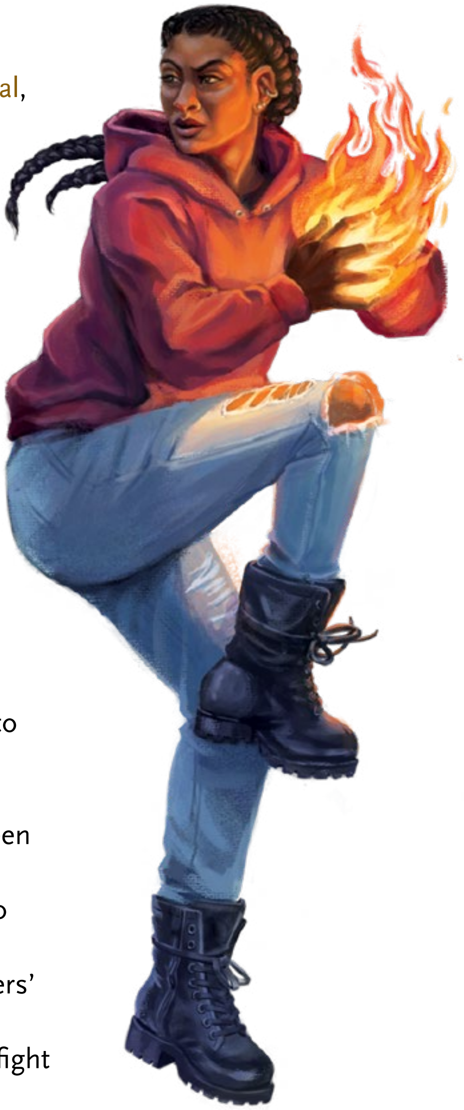
Antiquing, page 32

CARDINAL

Cardinal: *level 4; Speed tasks as level 6; health 20; flies a long distance each round; short-range flame burst deals 6 damage in an immediate area*

Isla Jefferson, also known as Cardinal, is the founder of the metahuman collective known as the Flock. Her mission is to bring the existence of metahumans into the light—mostly because doing so will inconvenience MAD, who currently has Flock members Nighthawk and Kestrel in their custody. Her primary method of getting MAD's attention has been setting fires in public places. MAD has shifted the narrative so that the general public believes these fires are due to makeshift bombs, while other groups of metahumans have turned against Cardinal as a threat to their secrecy.

Cardinal knows that the PCs are metahumans, and that MAD has been surveilling them. Her attack at the train station is an attempt to kill two birds with one stone: piss off MAD, while hopefully causing the characters' powers to manifest. She sees the characters as potential allies in her fight against MAD.



KINGFISHER

Kingfisher: *level 3; boxing and Might tasks as level 6; health 25; Armor 3*

Jordan Medina, also known as Kingfisher, is Cardinal's best friend. Jordan is estranged from her birth family, but considers the Flock her chosen family, and would do anything to free Nighthawk and Kestrel from MAD custody. Because being a metahuman doesn't pay the bills, she rakes in extra money using her super strength and resilience as a boxer at Lucky's.

Lucky's, page 33

"Do you recall the end of the world?"
—Cardinal

GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

"Going MAD" assumes that the PCs begin with no knowledge that metahumans are real, or that they're about to gain metahuman abilities. They have never heard of MAD. At least one PC has unknowingly had a recent brush with the Flock: they were in line at a local bank when it evacuated due to a bomb threat.

The adventure begins at a train station or transit center. If the PCs know each other, they could be leaving for a weekend trip together. Otherwise, they could be commuters taking the same route, perhaps recognizing each other due to their frequently overlapping schedules.

STATION FIRE

Start by describing a typical morning at the train station, as all kinds of people hurry to their destinations. The crowd includes three MAD agents (including Agent Madison). The agents are regular people dressed in black suits and wraparound sunglasses, looking around while waiting for trains; what may stand out to the PCs is that the agents are positioned at different locations in the station, even though they're clearly matching.

Any television monitors and newspaper headlines focus on a recent bombing at a local bank. There were very few civilian casualties, as the attackers forewarned and evacuated those inside; the sole purpose seemed to be property destruction. The perpetrator is unknown.

The first character to walk onto a train platform (or similar structure) finds a ticket stub on the ground that stands out in some way—perhaps it's the wrong size or color, or the logo doesn't match that of the local train line. The ticket looks pristine, unlike the other debris that's been trod under countless feet. Identifying what's odd about the train ticket is a difficulty 2 Intellect task; on a success, the character has a feeling of déjà vu and a brief, dull flash of pain behind their temples.

The train ticket is a manifest cypher from a divergent reality, whose power power and purpose are only detectable to metahumans. In this case, the cypher seems nebulously special, but cannot be used until the characters gain their own metahuman abilities. (Such cyphers are known as divergent timeline cyphers.)

THE FLOCK ARRIVES

Before the characters' train arrives at the platform, an emergency alarm sounds, followed by a crash and the smell of smoke. The crowd in the station panics, with people rushing towards emergency exits. The characters see a fare gate, ticket machine, or kiosk burst into flames instantaneously: between one moment and the next, the fire is big enough to roar as it burns.

Both Cardinal and Kingfisher are at the station, wearing ski masks. The superheroes' strategy is generally that Kingfisher throws heavy items, and Cardinal causes them to burst into flames on impact. To the PCs, this initially seems like a bombing, but it's odd that benches and map displays have been rigged to explode, and that one average-sized individual is able to fling them around.

While the metahumans seem intent on trashing the station as much as possible, their attacks have also created a bottleneck by blocking off multiple exits.

HELPED BY MAD

In the chaos, Agent Madison pulls a character out of the way of falling debris, or otherwise renders aid to a character. He introduces himself as a federal agent and promises to get the characters out of the station if they follow him. If the characters are uncertain, he reveals that the attackers are here to abduct them, while Agent Madison and his colleagues are here to keep them safe (which he fully believes to be true).

If the characters are still reluctant, Agent Madison and the three other field agents let them flounder on their own, ultimately intervening to rescue the PCs from under debris before the station eventually collapses.

RETREAT

True to his word, Agent Madison finds a clear path for the characters to exit the transit hub, as smoke and debris make navigation nearly impossible. The station's ceiling collapses behind the characters as they leave, and Agent Madison urges them into a black van that skids to a stop at the curb. A MAD

MAD field agent: *level 4; health 18; Armor 2; short-range enhanced taser attack inflicts 6 Speed damage (ignores Armor) and on failed Might defense task (hindered) stuns target for one minute*

Agent Madison, page 27

GM intrusion: *A fleeing character is knocked down or trampled by the panicked crowd.*

GM intrusion: *A structural support or ceiling beam caves in, trapping a character until they can escape with a level 4 Might task as their action.*

GM intrusion: *A character who fails a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll is injured by falling debris, inflicting 6 damage and stunning them.*

Train ticket: *level 5 detonation (sonic) cypher*

Detonation (sonic), page 387

Divergent Timeline Cyphers, page 20

Deputy Director St. George, page 27

Augustine Quicksilver, page 32

Manifesto, page 31

Antiquing, page 32

field agent is driving, with Deputy Director St. George in the passenger seat. An additional MAD field agent sits in the back of the van, with a first aid kit on hand to treat any injuries. If no characters are injured, the agent cleans and dresses a burn on Agent Madison's hand.

During the drive, St. George introduces herself as the deputy director of MAD, the Metahuman Affairs Department. She maintains a matter-of-fact demeanor as she tells the characters that "superheroes"—known as metahumans—are real, and that MAD's mission is to "prevent metahuman crime from impacting the general public."

She then reveals MAD has been keeping an eye on the characters, and was right to do so, because they were the intended victims of a "terrorist" organization known as the Flock. The Flock's leader, Cardinal, recently published a highly threatening manifesto; between this and the train station attack, it is imperative that the characters remain in protective custody until the culprits are caught. St. George asks for their cooperation—and isn't that only fair, seeing as MAD just saved their lives? If asked why the Flock would target the characters in particular, St. George seems uncertain, claiming it's a mystery.

The MAD van delivers the characters to a safehouse, a two-story home on a quiet residential street, where St. George assigns Agent Madison to stay with them. There's noticeable tension between St. George and Agent Madison; a character who succeeds on a difficulty 2 Intellect task can see that this is because Agent Madison seems to dislike his boss. (Actually, he doesn't fully trust her.)

INVESTIGATION

As the characters get settled in the safehouse, the living room television shows a news broadcast covering the "bombing" at the train station. A news anchor is interviewing Augustine Quicksilver, a local business owner, who says that he's found several "odd items" around town lately, which he believes are related to the seemingly impossible explosion he witnessed at the station today. The news channel cuts away in the middle of his recounting, pivoting to the weather report.

NEXT STEPS

If the PCs decide to investigate the secrets the Deputy Director is keeping from them, the encounters in this section detail some places they might look. They can try to sneak out of the safe house without alerting Agent Madison. Alternately, the characters can approach him for help, or convince him to accompany them. Due to Agent Madison's growing distrust of MAD leadership—and his own desire for an explanation—this has a difficulty of 2. On failure, Agent Madison does not directly help the characters in their investigation, but he also does not prevent them from leaving the safehouse.

If the PCs do not begin investigating of their own volition, it's not long before Agent Madison states that he's going looking for answers, and the PCs are welcome to join him. In this case, Agent Madison begins by going to Quicksilver Antiques, given the claim made by the antiques dealer about knowing something about the bombing.

If the PCs try to run away altogether, Agent Madison attempts to dissuade them with a vulnerable confession: he's lost faith in MAD's mission and can help the characters figure out what's really going on here. He warns the characters that they need to keep their resistance quiet, or else a squadron of MAD field agents will move them to a more "secure" holding facility, rather than the comfortable safehouse.

When the characters have made it through three or four investigation encounters and have gathered enough information to form their own opinions on MAD, move on to "Joining the Flock."

MANIFESTO

Cardinal's manifesto has been removed from the internet, but there are a few ways that the characters can find it. If characters seek out the manifesto on their personal device, it's a difficulty 3 Intellect task to determine that a Tumblr user with the handle cherubоooo took screenshots before the manifesto disappeared. This takes about half an hour of searching.

cherubоooo is a college student who loves superhero media (her Tumblr is mostly devoted to comics), is convinced that superheroes are real, and is determined to get past what she terms "government gaslighting." Most of her school friends think she's a conspiracy nut, so while she's vindicated at having definitive proof that metahumans exist, she's also reluctant to trust strangers with her evidence. Convincing cherubоooo to send the screenshots is a difficulty 4 persuasion task, though showing an interest in her favorite comics may ease the difficulty, or even make a roll unnecessary.

If characters seek out the manifesto on a MAD device (such as Agent Madison's work laptop), they're able to access the full text upon succeeding on a difficulty 6 hacking or programming task. The difficulty of this task is eased two steps by collaborating with Agent Madison—he doesn't technically have access to the manifesto, but he's hacked MAD's intranet before and knows how to do it again.

Cardinal's manifesto reveals the following:

- MAD doesn't just "prevent metahuman crime;" they kidnap metahumans for experimentation.
- Two members of the Flock (Nighthawk and Kestrel) are currently in MAD custody, and Cardinal will continue escalating attacks until they're released.
- Cardinal believes that the best way to take MAD down is to bring them into the spotlight, which is why her attacks are so flashy and public; other groups of metahumans have threatened to kill Cardinal to protect their secrecy.

ELSEWHERE ON THE INTERNET

If characters do further online research, they'll find crumbs of useful information intermingled with an overwhelming amount of nonsense. For every ten minutes spent browsing various blogs, forums, and social media platforms, a character discovers one of the following, though characters probably have no way of knowing what's a fact and what's a falsehood.

- **Fact:** The Flock's attacks seemed designed to minimize civilian casualties.
- **Fact:** Witnesses of previous attacks were flummoxed by seeing someone very scrawny, probably still a kid, lifting and throwing heavy objects.
- **Fact:** Sometimes normal people can develop superhuman abilities, though it's unclear how or why.
- **Fact:** A patron at the sports bar Lucky's was physically removed from the premises after his misogynistic comments led to an altercation. He claims that the employee who threw him out had some kind of superhuman strength; other witnesses think this lie is to protect his ego—a woman booted him.
- **Falsehood:** Secret government agents are kidnapping civilians to steal their tears, blood, and fingernails.

MAD field agent, page 36

Joining the Flock, page 34

GM intrusion: *A character attempting to break into Agent Madison's computer triggers a failsafe that disables all electronic devices within a short distance.*

Lucky's, page 33

Agent Madison's work laptop is in an upstairs bedroom of the safehouse. Guessing the password or otherwise bypassing the encrypted login is a difficulty 6 Intellect task.

- **Falsehood:** The government wants you to believe superheroes are on standby to save you, so that you behave recklessly and injure yourself, which will drive up healthcare costs.
- **Falsehood:** The deep state has created superhuman soldiers via genetic engineering; these soldiers live undercover, prepared to round up civilians into refugee camps after the government imposes martial law.
- **Falsehood:** Supernatural powers are a divine punishment for those who eat processed food, study the humanities, or dye their hair bright colors.
- **Falsehood:** Superhero conspiracy theorists are government plants, distracting you from the real conspiracy: JFK lives on the moon and has been secretly running the White House since his 1963 "assassination."

If characters reach out to any of the sources behind these online posts, or try to locate other witnesses of the train station attack, they don't get very far. Most sources don't reply. Those who seem willing to help the characters ultimately flake, due to coordinated MAD intimidation.

Pocket watch: *level 4 cypher; user can speak to corpse by talking to a version of it in another timeline that is still alive for 4 minutes*

Dollar coin: *level 5 cypher; user gains +5 to Armor against all attacks and effects, even effects that normally ignore Armor*

Mouse skull: *level 4 cypher; alternate timeline version of user appears for 4 rounds and helps user (unless the GM intrudes) effectively allowing user to take two turns a round*

Augustine Quicksilver: *level 3,persuasion and deception tasks as level 4*

Lucky's, page 33

ANTIQUING

A quick web search reveals that Augustine Quicksilver, the witness interviewed on the local news, owns Quicksilver Antiques, a shop specializing in vintage oddities. The shop is open from noon to eight pm. If the characters arrive during business hours, they're greeted by Augustine, a talkative older man with a knack for matching people to the perfect weird trinket. The shop is a beautifully chaotic mishmash of aesthetics and eras, shelves and bins overflowing with items—some of them useful, a lot of them artful junk. If the characters purchase something before asking Augustine about what happened at the train station, all persuasion tasks are eased.

Augustine is initially reticent, because mysterious government employees visited him at his home and asked him to keep quiet about the whole ordeal. If the characters convince him that they're trustworthy (a difficulty 3 persuasion task, eased if the PCs buy something), Augustine talks at length about how the bombing defied belief ("I'm an army veteran, okay? I've seen my share of explosions, and they don't work like that."), and mentions a slew of odd items that he's either found or that have been pawned at the shop. He pulls out a box of such items from below the counter.

ODD ITEMS

Augustine knows the items are weird just by looking at them, but for a regular person, that's as far as it goes. The items—divergent timeline cyphers—take on additional traits for metahumans (and sometimes, for people about to manifest as metahumans).

Augustine shows the PCs a pocket watch with four hands, a dollar coin with Sojourner Truth on the face, and a mouse skull with four eye sockets. He's willing to part with these divergent timeline cyphers if the characters offer a fair price, but he's more concerned with identifying their provenance than he is with making a profit.

TAKE SOME!

If the characters haven't been to Lucky's, Augustine gives the characters flyers for the bar from a stack he keeps on the shop's counter. Augustine insists that the PCs take an extra few flyers to pass along—he has way more than he can distribute, but he would feel bad throwing them away, because the boxers who left them here seemed really earnest and are really interested in the odd things he finds.

LUCKY'S

Lucky's is a generic sports bar, with one distinction: a boxing ring at its center. If characters arrive in the evening, the bar is quiet and Bo, the owner, is behind the bar slicing limes. If characters arrive at night, Bo is circulating through the crowd that is forming around the ring, taking down bets. Either way, it's difficult to engage Bo in conversation—he seems as if he'd rather be doing anything else.

If asked for details about his fighters, Bo tells the characters they must earn that information: either one of them fights one-on-one against Rio, or all of them fight against Jordan as a team. It's a difficulty 6 perception task to recognize Jordan as Kingfisher, eased for characters who found images of Kingfisher in action online.

Whether the characters win or lose the fight, Bo and Jordan are both impressed by their determination. Jordan takes the characters out into the alley behind the bar to talk. She reveals the following:

- Jordan is Kingfisher, and can corroborate that two of her friends (Nighthawk and Kestrel) are being held in MAD custody.
- MAD kidnaps and experiments on metahumans, and the Flock's goal is to put this to an end.
- Jordan can also clarify any of the information included in Cardinal's manifesto.
- Cardinal has been looking for the characters because she wants their help—and Jordan will tell Cardinal that she's contacted them.

Bo: *level 2, bartending tasks as level 4*

Rio: *level 4, defense tasks as level 5*

Manifesto, page 31

Kingfisher, page 28

Elsewhere on the Internet, page 31

JOINING THE FLOCK

Cardinal, page 28

Kingfisher, page 28

Once the characters have learned what MAD really does, Cardinal herself arrives at their safehouse (or wherever the characters are taking stock), with Kingfisher in tow. Cardinal knows they were detained by MAD after the train station attack, but she hopes that they aren't actually loyal to MAD: the Flock needs allies.

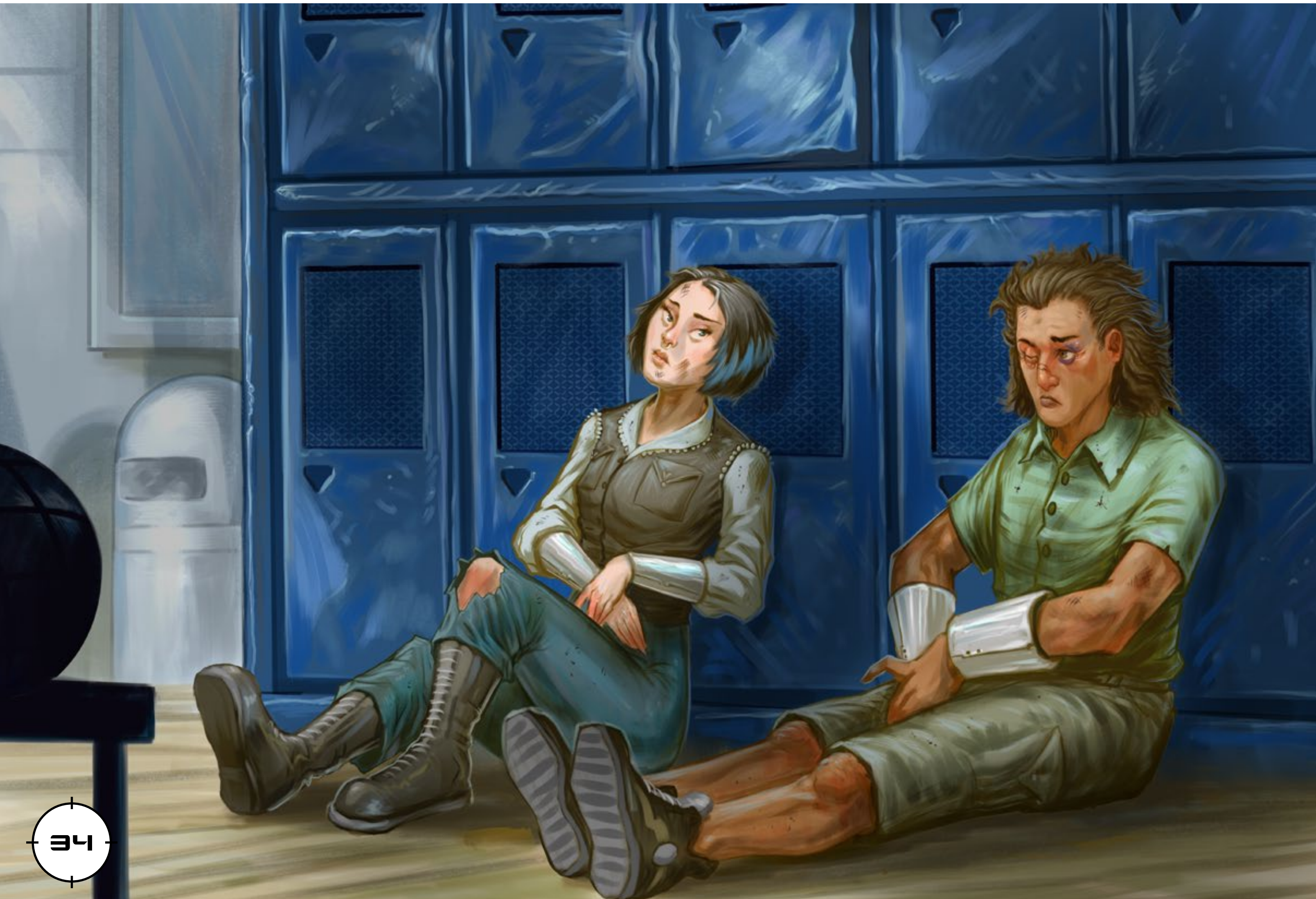
She knows the characters are incipient metahumans, and had hoped that witnessing her use her powers would trigger the manifestation of their own. By now, she's realized that a more direct approach is necessary.

If the characters are eager to help Cardinal, she asks them if they would like to join the Flock and help free Nighthawk and Kestrel, then mentions the Crash so that the characters can help in the coming fight.

If the characters are considering siding with MAD, Cardinal mentions the Crash—once the characters become metahumans, they'll become MAD targets, and—she hopes—be forced to take her side.

REMEMBERING THE CRASH

The characters are thrown into a horrific memory—something they're bewildered that they could have forgotten in the first place. They remember the buildup to the disaster as the interstellar object known as Nibiru fell towards Earth. They remember the moment of impact, how it felt for the planet to literally be torn in two. They remember the fear, the pain. It was real—it must have been. It feels real, now, and they're powerless to stop it.



But when the characters open their eyes, freed from the flashback, they're still in the safehouse. The world spins on.

Now that they've recalled the Crash, the characters gain their metahuman powers.

BECOMING METAHUMAN

In this section, the PCs gain metahuman abilities after a conversation with Cardinal. Each player gains three power shifts and can choose a new descriptor, type, and focus; they keep their mundane focus, but cannot advance in it past tier 1.

As the PCs develop their powers, use the rules for uncontrolled discovery.

UNCONTROLLED DISCOVERY

When a PC's metahuman abilities first begin to manifest after they recall the Crash, their specific powers aren't set. One moment the character may be able to shoot lasers out of their eyes, the next phase through solid material, and a few seconds after that, shrink anything they touch.

This is a dangerous time, and those who undergo this process may think they're losing their mind at first.

You can simulate this for the PCs by giving each PC a GM intrusion while they're picking their new abilities and power shifts from the *Cypher System Rulebook*. These GM intrusions should focus on the PCs not having control of the ability they're choosing, or even *which* ability they're trying to choose, endangering themselves and their friends. Options include:

- PC grows too large to move
- PC becomes intangible and can't interact with anything
- PC uncontrollably shoots electric bolts from fingertips
- PC's voice breaks nearby objects
- PC encased in freezing ice
- Etc.

The effects of uncontrolled discovery last until a PC gains control of the power flare by succeeding on three difficulty 3 Intellect tasks, which they can make once a round as their action. Once a character gains control, the entire episode ends for that character, and they get the powers they actually want.

This scene may take a while, but it's an opportunity to ground the players in the world of *The Origin*; it's also an opportunity to build the characters' rapport with Cardinal and Kingfisher, as the more experienced metahumans coach the characters through the process of discovering their powers.

After each character finalizes their powers, make sure each player updates their character sheet before moving on.

If you have *The Origin*, additional details are described in the Uncontrolled Discovery section.

Power shift, page 292

Uncontrolled Discovery, page 9

OPERATION PRISON BREAK

Once the players have updated their character sheets and are ready to dive back in, Cardinal briefs them on the real mission: freeing Kestrel and Nighthawk from MAD custody.

Kestrel and Nighthawk are being kept in a facility an hour outside of the city. Cardinal offers to drive the characters there in a rented cargo van, unless they have access to other means of transportation. The facility was formerly a high school, but has since been abandoned—and reappropriated for MAD use.

Prior to infiltrating, make sure each PC is full up on subtle cyphers.

GM intrusion: *A character's new powers behave in an unexpected way, such as shooting a ray of ice instead of fire.*

Subtle Cypher Table, page 383

> *"If we get caught . . . whatever MAD's doing to Kestrel and Nighthawk, they'll do to you." — Kingfisher*

Secret agent: *level 5; disguise and perception tasks as level 6; Armor 2 from bulletproof vest; inflicts 5 damage*

Deputy Director St. George, page 27

MAD field agent: *level 4; health 18; Armor 2; short-range enhanced taser attack inflicts 6 Speed damage (ignores Armor) and on failed Might defense task (hindered) stuns target for one minute*

GM intrusion: *In addition to the three secret agents patrolling the building's exterior, there is one drinking coffee in the faculty lounge; they come running at any sign of a disturbance.*

Redwood High and its grounds is hosting a total of seven secret agents.

Running a Campaign Set in The Origin, page 13

Kestrel: *level 3, Speed tasks as level 6; health 20; can use an action to move a long distance by flying; can use an action to become invisible*

Nighthawk: *level 3, Speed tasks as level 6; health 20; can use an action to shapeshift into any lifeform she's touched in the past month*

MAD suppression cuffs: *level 7 artifact; metal handcuffs that disable the metahuman wearing them for seven hours, so that the cuffed target can only move an immediate distance and complete the simplest of mental tasks; a PC wearing cuffs can attempt a Might defense roll against the cuffs' level once per hour; depletion 1 in 1d20*

INFILTRATION

Redwood High's main entrances are patrolled by three secret agents. If two of the agents are reduced to 0 health, the third uses a handheld radio to signal that there's been a security breach. In this case, Deputy Director St. George and the field agent accompanying her begin to load Nighthawk and Kestrel onto a school bus behind the main building in order to transport them elsewhere.

The characters have two other options for entering the building: A window has been left unlatched on the second story, leading to a very dusty math classroom. There's also a skylight in the ceiling of an art classroom; breaking the skylight is a level 2 Might task.

REDWOOD HIGH

Redwood High (go mastiffs!) is your average suburban public high school. It was abandoned for several years before MAD began using it as a detainment facility, so some of the classrooms are littered with empty cans and bottles. The main floor is decorated with a mural of a snarling mastiff, which has since been scrawled over with graffiti.

Deputy Director St. George and her assistant are working out of the athletic coaches' offices, which abut the gym. If they learn that the PCs have attacked—and that they have superpowers—they'll attempt to escape the school. If the characters confront them directly, the Deputy Director attempts to bargain.

Kestrel and Nighthawk are detained in the locker room under the football field. Both are wearing MAD suppression cuffs, preventing them from taking all but the simplest actions. Removing the cuffs is a level 7 Might task.

EXFILTRATION

Any secret agents who the characters have not yet engaged with band together to prevent the characters from escaping. Kestrel and Nighthawk are both reduced to 7 health after weeks of MAD experimentation, but are able to help out if needed.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

A group of three or more PCs should be able to free Kestrel and Nighthawk from the MAD detainment site, though they may run into some bumps as they adjust to their new powers. If any PCs descend three steps on the damage track, they are knocked unconscious and detained by MAD.

Moving forward, the PCs are MAD targets. Whether they want to join the Flock and work with Cardinal on a long-term basis is up to them, but either way, it'll be impossible for them to return to their previous lives. For additional pointers on next steps for the PCs, check out Running a Campaign Set in *The Origin*.

XP FOR CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Award each character 1 XP for saving Kestrel and 1 XP for saving Nighthawk.

CHAPTER 3

THE FOX AND THE CROWS

BY SHANNA GERMAIN

AN ADVENTUTURE FEATURING

WE ARE ALL MAD HERE

CHAPTER 3

THE FOX AND THE CROWS

"The Fox and the Crows" is a fairy-tale adventure that can be played as a stand-alone in a few sessions or added to an existing campaign.

Characters can be built using *Cypher System Rulebook* and/or *We are All Mad Here*. If you don't have *We are All Mad Here*, ask your players to create characters appropriate to a fairy-tale setting.

Fairy Tale, page 302

The adventure is designed for low-tier characters but could easily be adjusted for higher-tier characters by introducing additional interactions, hurdles, and GM intrusions. Any beast, being, place, or object that would be appropriate to a fairy-tale game could be added as an ally, quest giver, threat, or item of interest.

King Kol, page 45

You can download pregenerated first-tier characters for this adventure at: https://mymcg.info/aitcs-pregens

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The player characters are all members of a Robinhood-esque group called the Crows. They go around performing good (but often small and sometimes illegal) deeds for the Kingdom, doing their best to help balance out the money, power, and opportunities of those who live here. This is especially difficult because of King Kol—the Kingdom's ruler who has not just lost touch with his people, but who is also growing more power-hungry as the years go on.

The PCs have been waiting a long time for an opportunity to come along that will let them make a huge change.

That opportunity has just arrived.

Using This Adventure

Throughout this book, you'll see page references to the Cypher System Rulebook accompanied by this symbol, where you can find additional details about that rule, ability, creature, or concept.

Princess Rani, King Kol's great-granddaughter, has come to the Crows asking for help. She believes her grandfather is no longer fit to rule, not only because he's hecking bad at it, but because he's using an artifact to grow ever more powerful and she's worried about what might happen to both him and to the Kingdom if he continues to use it.

Rani, page 46

Rani and her soon-to-be spouse, Elora, offer to help the Crows steal the artifact, a glowing crystal orb called the Breath of Life, during the upcoming wedding ball. Although Rani's never seen the Breath of Life, she's heard her grandfather talk about it, and knows he keeps it locked up somewhere on the secret upper floors of the Royal Palace.

Elora, page 46

Breath of Life, page 57

If you're inserting this adventure into a longer campaign, then the PCs might not be part of the Crows. Instead, they might be friends with Princess Rani, they might be hired by her, they might know members of the Crows, or they might just be in the right place at the right time.

The name and location of the kingdom is left purposefully vague in this adventure. The GM can choose to keep it that way (everyone has an idea of what the Kingdom means in a fairy-tale setting), create their own, or adapt a location from *We are All Mad Here*.

The Crows

The Crows have been around as long as there have been people in power who shouldn't be. Which is to say, forever. They're a loose-knit group that works hard to stay in the shadows, using actual crows to carry messages, employing an ever-changing language to keep their activities hidden, and doing their best to redistribute wealth and power as best they're able. Illegality is not an issue, but their general code is "don't hurt those who are already hurt and try not to kill anyone (even if they definitely deserve it)." Many members are tavern keepers, stable sweepers, millers and tanners, and others who don't draw undue attention to themselves by their presence.

The PCs are all members of the Crows—each player can decide how long their character has been involved and to what extent. Some suggestions include:

- A brand-new member who's still learning the ropes
- An old hand who's just about to "retire" from doing active work, but will still be around as a guide and resource
- An experienced member who used to be part of the upper crust and has a lot of drive to make change
- Someone who got involved via a friend or partner, but doesn't feel super passionate about the group's purpose

BACKGROUND

King Kol. King Kol was once a merry old soul—generous and giving, careful with his power and privilege—but no longer. As he's aged, he's become a ruler who believes he deserves everything he has and everything he wants. He's not above using his power to pillage, steal, demand, force, and otherwise get whatever catches his eye. Mostly he covets anything that allows him to keep as much of his life and health and power as he can. For years, he's used an artifact called the Breath of Life to keep himself stronger and healthier, but his artifact use is also accelerating his hunger for power.

Rani. The king's great-granddaughter doesn't necessary wish to rule the kingdom (she has seen the negative impact of having power over others), nor does she wish to see the king killed or injured. She just wants to see him returned to his normal lifespan and power, and ideally, returned to the kinder, more generous leader that Rani remembers.

The Royal Palace. King Kol's palace is renowned for its opulence and over-the-top decor. Some might even say gaudy (but not in the King's hearing). From the outside, it's a huge multi-story structure covered in gold, silver, hand-painted tiles, and all manner of gems and jewels. It's also protected by a magical barrier made of living trees and woken water.

The inside is decorated similarly. The first floor, which is the only floor ever open to outsiders, is mostly an expansive ballroom with a large circular fish tank in the center, a small walled garden off to the side, and Blaubart's Way (a long hallway with treasures) in the back.

And what of the other floors? No one, except King Kol and perhaps the dead, knows what's up there, but there are whispered tales of roaming dead and glass-coffined living, creatures of tooth and claw, and even a forest with no end.

The Wedding Ball. The wedding ball is a large, lavish affair, filled with both locals and out-of-towners. Everyone has dressed in their finest attire and put on their best face to honor the engaged couple, whether they agree with King Kol's way of ruling or not. Many guests also have their own agendas, whether it's just to see the palace's ornate interior, try to get in good with King Kol, eat enormous amounts of food, or something more devious. It begins at dusk and ends exactly at midnight.

The Breath of Life. The stories of this artifact go way back—most people have heard the version of it where a magical creature named Fox-Fire exhaled a powerful globe of light called the Breath of Life. The story goes that the globe gave Fox-Fire eternal life and good luck, until someone came along and stole it.

But that version of the story isn't entirely correct, as it's Fox-Fire itsself who is the artifact, exhaling a globe of light every night at midnight. King Kol has locked away Fox-Fire's soul so that the creature cannot leave.

The Goal. The PCs need to figure out a way to get into the secret upper floors of the palace, deal with King Kol's various protections, traps, curses, and creatures, find Fox-Fire, and free its soul. Perhaps even without disrupting the wedding ball happening downstairs.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

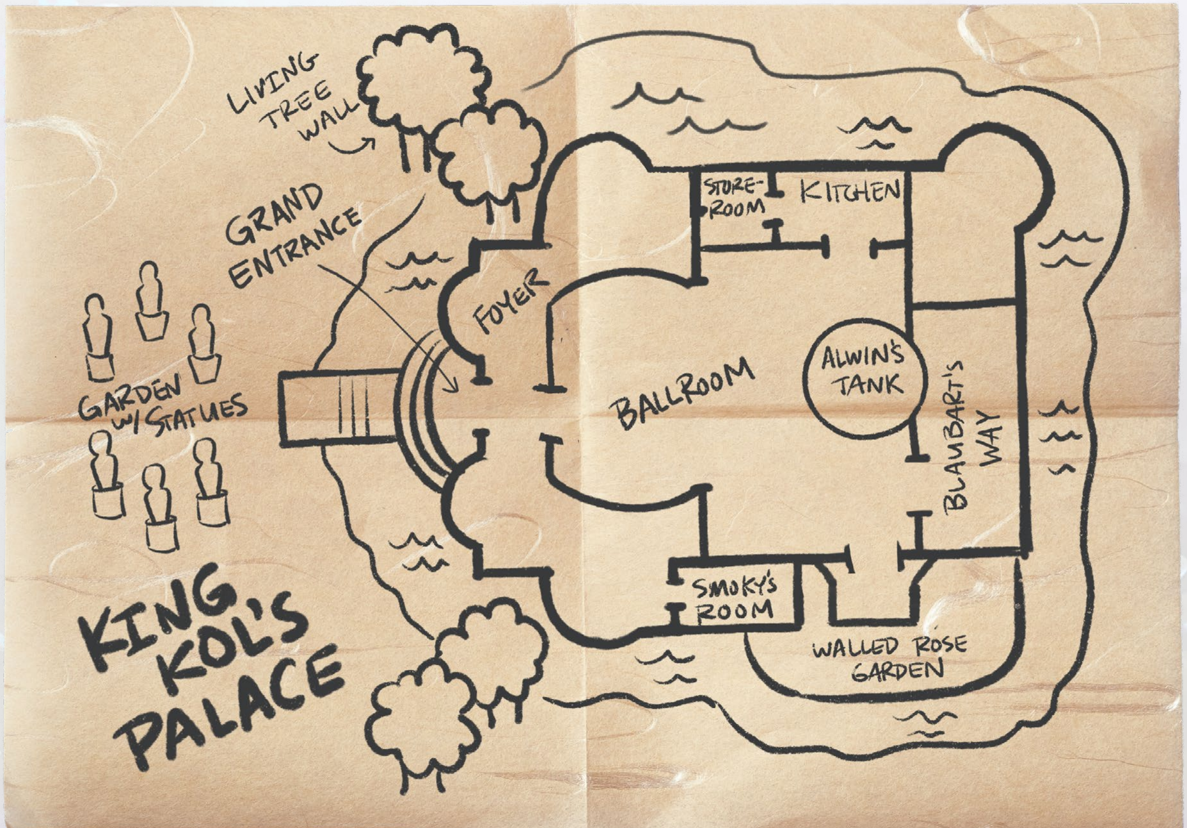
The adventure begins in the morning of the wedding ball. A few weeks ago, King Kol's great-granddaughter came to the PCs as members of the Crows, asking for their assistance. She explained that although she loves her great-grandfather very much, she believes that he's no longer doing a good job of ruling—and she thinks it's at least in part due to his reliance on an artifact he calls the Breath of Life. It gives him extra health and power, but it also seems to be changing him, making him into a careless, self-focused person and ruler.

In the hopes of restoring her great-grandfather to himself and making him see the error of his ways so that he can either return to being a good ruler or pass the role on to someone else more suited, she asked the Crows to steal the Breath of Life. The king has told her that he keeps the artifact locked away somewhere on the secret second floor of the palace, a place that no one but the king is allowed to go.

Because the palace is normally warded with a magical barrier of living trees and woken water, Rani believes the Crows' best chance of achieving their goal is during her upcoming wedding ball. There will be more guards and people, of course, but there will also be more for the guards to keep an eye on, and the Crows won't have to try and get through the palace's barrier.

Rani provided the PCs with a hand-drawn map of the first floor of the palace, as well as tokens—enough for each person to gain entry to the ball. The tokens are small blue stones with large holes in their center that tighten to fit the wearer's finger. She does ask that the group do their best not to ruin the wedding ball or to hurt her great-grandfather in the process of getting the artifact.

The palace's second floor exists in a somewhat metaphorical space rather than a purely physical one, and as such, there is no fixed map for it.



Suggested Steps

Introductions. Since the PCs have likely known each other and worked together for a while, have the players take a few moments to introduce their characters to each other. They might talk about what they look like, what their skills are (especially skills that they would have used in relation to the Crows' various exploits), how long they've been part of the Crows, and so on. If PCs have connections with each other, they might tie those into previous adventures with the group.

Create a Plan. The PCs will likely want to go into the ball with some sort of plan. Encourage them to peruse the palace map and ask any additional questions they might have. Rani would have been able to tell them any of the items in the What Is Known list if they had asked her. Anything else, they will likely have to figure out once they've arrived.

Give them the opportunity to get invested and be creative. Maybe they want to talk about what they're wearing and how they had their outfit made special to hide their weapon. Maybe they want to devise an elaborate heist-like plan, or maybe they're just going to wing it.

Don't allow the PCs to get too bogged down in this stage. If interest is starting to flag or they get too deep in the weeds, perhaps remind them that all plans are likely to go awry, and don't be afraid to use the ticking clock to get them moving.

Arrive. It's time! The ball has begun. The PCs arrive at the palace at their chosen time so they can begin to put their plan in action.

GM tip: This adventure is heavily character driven, meaning that much of what happens and how it happens will be in the group's hands rather than the GM's. There are many ways for the PCs to achieve their goal, so you'll likely want to become familiarized with the various sections ahead of time so that you can be ready for whatever the PCs decide to tackle next.

What Is Known

While King Kol and his palace have many secrets, there are some things about him and his home that most people know (or think they know) and will share if asked. These are things that it's fairly easy for the PCs to learn as they talk with various NPCs.

- King Kol is at least 120 years old.
- There is no obvious way to get to the second floor of the castle.
- The giant tank in the center of the ballroom is home to a large magical octopus named Alwin.
- The items in Blaubart's Way are protected by some sort of magic spell or creature. At least one of these items is cursed.
- The King has a lifelong companion named BitterBloom who is bound to protect the King at all costs, even to her death.

THE WEDDING BALL

With hundreds of invited guests, the wedding ball is a grand event, the likes of which the region hasn't seen in a long while. Everyone here is dressed to the nines, the mood is high, and there's a sense of excitement (and entitlement) in the air.

Getting Inside

Front Entrance. The easiest way to get inside is via the grand entrance in the front. Two large stone lions are checking tokens here, and only those guests with legit tokens are allowed to enter. Anyone else is turned away, and those that resist or create a ruckus of any kind are temporarily turned to stone. The tokens Rani gave the PCs work and allow them entrance into the palace. Black crows stationed upon the doorway verbally remind everyone that the ball ends at midnight sharp.

Through the Barrier. It's possible—but very difficult—to get through the magical barrier that surrounds the palace. The living trees form a wall that's about six feet deep and seems to rise into the sky. Inside that is a ten-foot-wide moat of woken water.

GM Tip: It is very likely that the PCs will split the party as soon as they walk into the ballroom, so it's good to be prepared for that. Don't try and force them together, but do make sure that each small group or individual gets a chance to move their part of the story forward.

Ball GM Intrusions

At various points during the ball, some interesting and unexpected things might happen. Use these GM intrusions as you see fit, to enhance the mood, add an interruption to the PCs' actions, create some excitement, and so on.

- King Kol gets up on stage with Rani, Elora, and BitterBloom and gives a long and rambling speech that is mostly self-congratulatory, but a little bit about the upcoming wedding.
- The band plays something upbeat and raucous that makes conversation difficult and gets all the guests flooding to the dance floor at once.
- Yes Chef yells at someone and a fight ensues.
- A guest attempts to steal something from Blaubart's Way and it goes poorly.
- Someone attempts to pet Smoky, and Smoky retaliates.
- The niblings are playing a wild game of tag and run into or over one or more of the PCs.
- King Kol introduces himself to one of the PCs and asks them how they know his great-granddaughter.

GM intrusion: *The stone lions believe that someone (perhaps reporter Evek Vy) in line in front of the PCs is using a fake token. A ruckus ensues, and the attendee tries to get one or more of the PCs involved.*

Stone lion: *level 4; Armor 3; bite deals damage and, on a failed level 5 Might defense roll, turns target to stone—a stone character can attempt another Might defense roll each round to break free*

Living tree wall: *level 4; squeezing through the wall takes one round and requires a successful Speed task; on a failed Speed defense roll, branches reach out and slip beneath a character's nails, into their eyes, or enter some other point of weakness, causing such anguish that the character takes 4 Intellect damage and is hindered on their next action (and pushing them back out the way they came)*

Woken water moat: *level 5; on a failed Might defense roll, turbulence inflicts 5 damage each round to anyone who tries to swim it without permission*

Blaubart's Way, page 52

Who's Who at the Ball

Palace Main Floor, page 50

What Is Known, page 42

Secrets: Ways To Get To The Second Floor, page 47

King Kol, page 45

BitterBloom, page 46

Rani, page 46

Elora, page 46

Evek Vy, page 48

Aedion, page 48

The Niblings, page 48

Smoky, page 49

Alwin, page 49

Yes Chef, page 49

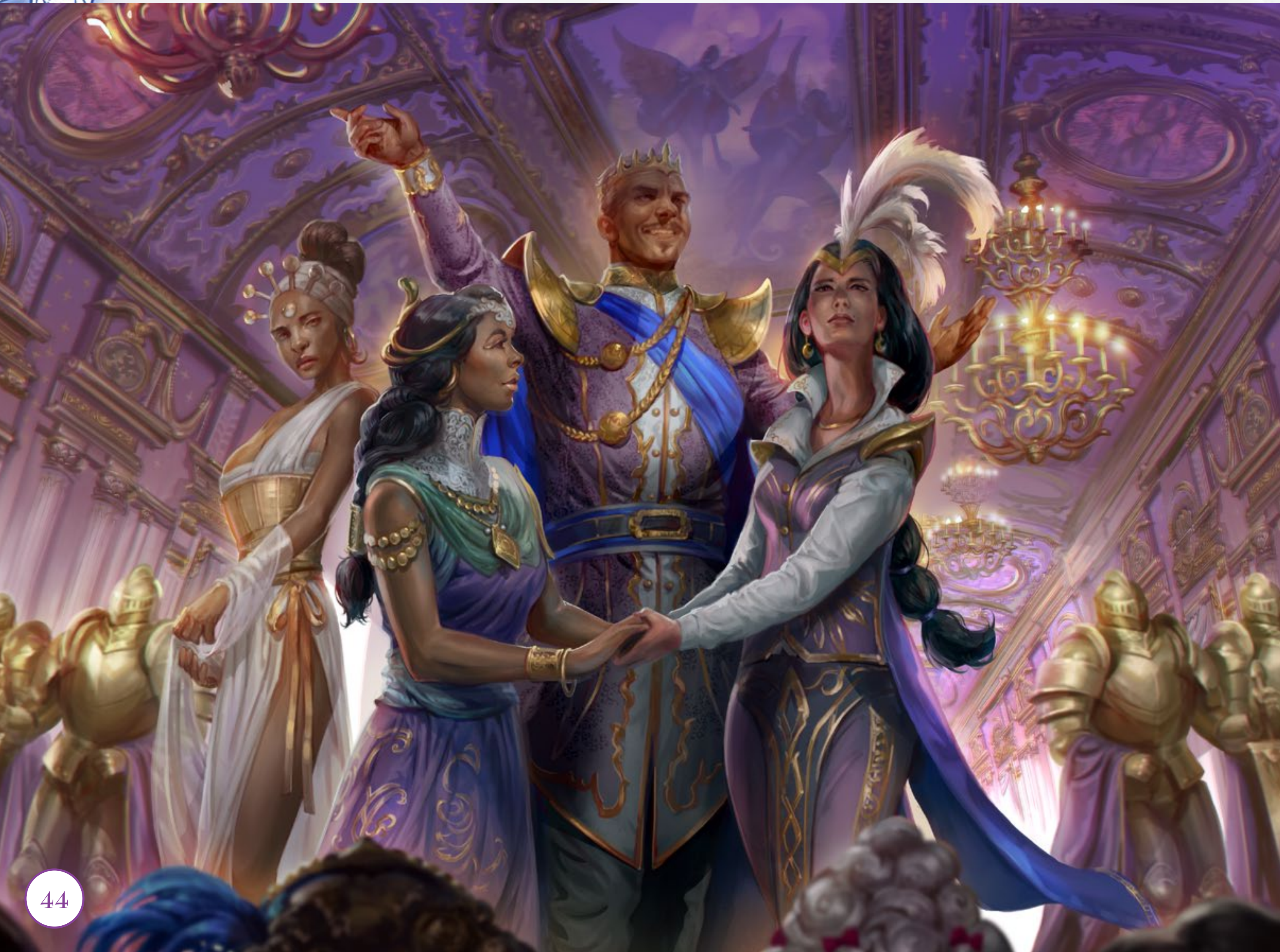
The main floor of the palace is lavishly decorated for the ball. While in attendance, the PCs can expect to run into the following guests, staff, and residents:

- King Kol
- BitterBloom, king's attendant
- Rani, a princess (and reason PCs are at the ball)
- Elora, another princess, and Rani's betrothed
- Evek Vy, reporter
- Aedion, retired fairy godmother
- The Niblings, various children
- Smoky, palace cat
- Alwin, palace octopus
- Yes Chef, palace chef

Many of the guests, staff, and residents know basic truths (see What Is Known) about the palace, the king, or the situation that can be useful to the PCs.

More importantly, they all know at least one secret related to reaching the second floor of the palace. But of course, most likely want something in return.

GM Tip: Many NPCs will only share one secret, but some have multiple secrets listed. This is to make sure that you can give the PCs something that is useful to the direction they are hoping to go. For example, the niblings know about the dumbwaiter and the rose trellis. If the PCs already know about the dumbwaiter



before running into one of the niblings, then have the child tell them about the rose garden instead.

In short, pick and choose which secret each NPC gives the characters to make sure they feel rewarded for the work they've done.

GM Tip: Make use of the ball GM Intrusions while the PCs mingle with guests.

THE ROYAL FAMILY

King Kol. The king is a tall, wide-shouldered man with a booming voice who hires the best magical tailors in the land to create outfits that do their best to make him seem younger and fitter than he is. Beneath his elegant attire, he always wears a swan-feather shirt.

Despite his power-hungry ways, the king is a good host. He loves his great-granddaughter deeply and is throwing this celebration to honor her and Elora. He greets everyone with the good cheer and ease of someone who knows he's the most powerful person in the room. He never goes anywhere without BitterBloom, his personal advisor and protector, at his back.

The king is not someone who fights his own battles; if the PCs attempt to engage him in combat, he will find a way to get out of the space and rely on others to handle the situation.

Secrets: All, but cannot be convinced to give them up

Imprison

Spell creates a prison within long range and captures a foe inside it on a failed difficulty 5 defense task (Might, Speed, or Intellect, depending on the type of imprisonment). The prison might be physical (a tower, a cage, a trap, a binding around the body) or mental (they can't move, their muscles are no longer under their control, they are afraid to move). Imprisoned targets can attempt a level 5 task (of the appropriate stat) every few rounds as their action to escape.

Ball GM Intrusions, page 43

King Kol: *level 5; leadership, persuasion, and coercion as level 6; health 30; Armor 4 (from swan-feather shirt); regains 3 health per round (from Breath of Life).*

SWAN-FEATHER SHIRT (ARTIFACT)

Level: 8

Form: Shirt fashioned of black feathers

Effect: The shirt acts as light armor and grants an additional 3 Armor in addition to the 1 Armor that light armor typically provides. Once per day, the wearer can pluck one feather from the shirt, which becomes a level 2 swan that helps protect the wearer (by creating a distraction, attacking a foe, offering an asset to an attack or defense, and so on, as long as it's something a swan can normally do).

Depletion: 1 in 1d10 (roll each time a feather is plucked; the shirt still functions as light armor after the swan protection ability is depleted)

BitterBloom: *level 4; resists persuasion, coercion, and mental attacks as level 6; hair pin transforms into longsword that inflicts 5 damage; heals touched target for 5 health or Pool points; can cast imprison*

BitterBloom. Once King Kol's invisible childhood friend, BitterBloom was made real via a deal with a powerful fey queen. She is tall and willowy, wearing a diaphanous dress with her hair tucked up into a wrap, and always just a few paces behind the king.

BitterBloom is bound to King Kol via a deal he made with his fairy godmother, Aedion, when he was just a child. She is unable to do or say anything that would put his life or his rule in danger unless the bind is removed. But if that were to happen, she would be able to offer the PCs a secret as well as her assistance.

Secrets: All

Aedion, page 48

Removing the Bind, page 48

Secrets: Ways to get to the second floor, page 47

Rani: *level 3, positive social interactions as level 5*

Elora: *level 3*

Breath of Life, page 57

Imprison, page 45

Rani. From all outward appearances, Rani is the perfect royal princess—dressed in a lace-and-leather gown and moving through the ball with the same ease and confidence as her great-grandfather. She is eternally charming, eloquent, and approachable. However, beneath that sweet demeanor is a spine of steel and a strong sense of justice.

Rani always wears a medium-sized golden locket, a gift from King Kol. He told her never to open it because it's designed to protect her from harm. (Rani doesn't know that the golden locket actually holds the secret of Fox-Fire's imprisonment. If PCs manage to find King Kol's bedroom, they'll learn the truth directly from Fox-Fire.)

Secret of Fox-Fire's Imprisonment, page 57

King Kol's Bedroom, page 56

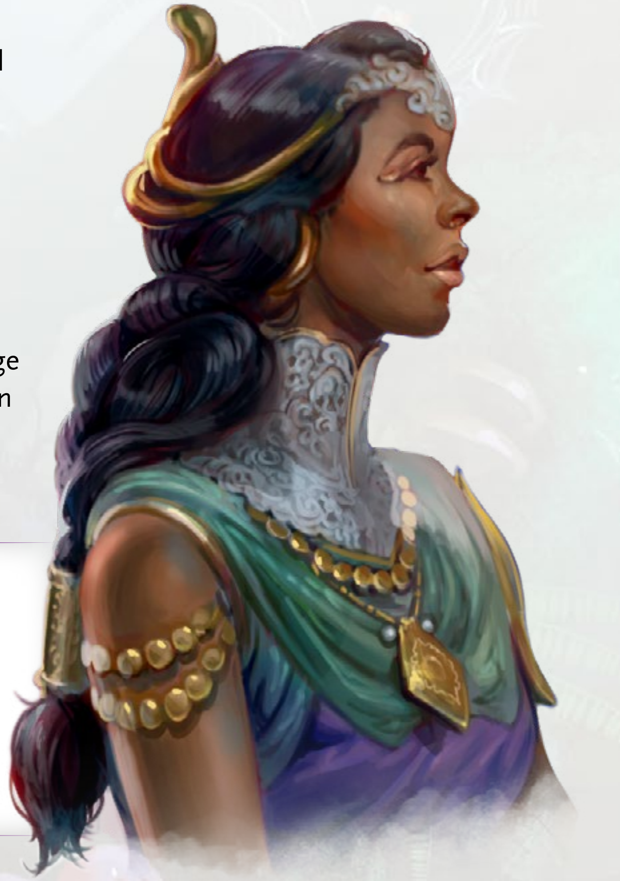
During the ball, Rani will act as though she doesn't know any of the PCs, but that doesn't mean she's not paying attention to what they're doing.

Secrets: None beyond what she's already given to the PCs to get the adventure started and to get them into the ball

Elora. Rani's future spouse is a little rougher around the edges, and it's clear that playing the part of a future royal is something she has to work hard at.

She and Rani share similar ideals, but don't always agree on how to go about them, as Elora seems a little more willing to burn everything to the ground. She won't. Yet. But only because she loves and respects Rani as much as she does.

Secrets: None, but she will help the PCs if she can find a way to do so discreetly



> If the PCs are having trouble learning the secrets, don't be afraid to draw their attention to a place or person by creating an interesting diversion, such as a fight, loud conversation, or accident.

Secrets: Ways To Get To The Second Floor

These can be learned from various guests, staff members, and palace residents.

THE EXTREMELY FLATTERING PORTRAIT

From: BitterBloom, Smoky

Details: Located at the farthest end of Blaubart's Way, the secret stairs to the second floor can be accessed by convincing a magically animate extremely flattering portrait of King Kol (has he ever actually looked like that?) to give up its painted crown. By looking through the crown, the PCs can see the hidden and locked doorway to the right of the portrait that opens onto the secret stairs.

Blaubart's Way, page 52

Extremely flattering portrait: *level 5*

Hidden and locked doorway: *level 6; can be opened with the bone key*

ROSES OF THE GUARD

From: BitterBloom, Smoky

Details: Along the east side of the palace in the walled garden, there's a trellis covered in large, black roses. The roses call out in soft voices to anyone who approaches, asking to be told how pretty they are, how beautiful, how absolutely ravishing.

The trellis can be climbed to the second story, but the roses attempt to prevent it by capturing, scratching, and cursing those who attempt it.

Roses of the Guard: *level 4; resist trickery, flattery, and persuasion as level 2; thorns inflict 4 damage to trespassing climbers and on a failed difficulty 4 Might defense task, the pricked target is cursed, falling asleep for ten minutes or until they are awoken by some type of magic that removes curses (such as a true love's kiss)*

THE DUMBWAITER

From: BitterBloom, Smoky, Niblings

Details: A dumbwaiter is hidden in the kitchen. You can get to it by going through the large bottom door in the pie-shelf. The dumbwaiter is large enough for a single person to fit inside, but it hasn't been used in years because it needs a magical power source.

The PCs need to get it into working order if they hope to use it. There's a small box in the back of the dumbwaiter where the magic source needs to go. Any cypher of level 3 or higher is strong enough to power the dumbwaiter for a single trip up and back, while an artifact will power it for about a day. The dumbwaiter can also be activated for one trip up and back by a PC using a spell or magical ability that costs at least 3 Intellect points.

Dumbwaiter: *level 4; requires magical power source to operate*

BONE KEY

From: Alwin

Details: The bone key opens the door to a hidden and locked doorway somewhere in Blaubart's Way. Behind that door is a circular stairway that goes to the second floor.

GUESTS

Evek Vy: *level 3, persuasion and perception as level 5*

Nibling: *level 1*

Evek Vy. Slender and dark haired, Evek is a reporter from the local paper, ostensibly here to see what interesting bits of gossip he can learn, but in truth attempting to get a big scoop on King Kol's doings. He whips out a notepad and quill whenever he speaks to someone new, is full of rumors about the king and palace, will happily exchange gossip, and will do almost anything to learn more truths.

Secrets: None, but wants to know them all

Aedion: *level 4; can cast spells of illusion, health, defense, and binding removal*

Aedion. Elderly but spry, Aedion was once both King Kol's and Rani's fairy godmother but has long since retired from all magic-usery to run an assisted-living home in the next town over. She cast the original bind upon BitterBloom and could remove it, but would need to be convinced to do so and then would need assistance from the PCs, as she rarely practices magic these days. She is likely found in the garden or resting in one of the quieter rooms toward the front of the palace.

Secret: Roses of the Guard

Dumbwaiter, page 47

The Niblings: There are any number of children running around, all claiming to be King Kol's nieces and nephews, which is only unusual because he is an only child. The PCs might run into Clara, Elias, or Little Tommy, especially in the kitchen or the walled garden. They know a couple of secrets but won't reveal anything they know unless someone plays a game of hide and seek with them (one of them will hide in the dumbwaiter).

Secrets: Roses of the Guard, Dumbwaiter

GM Tip: If you're adding this adventure to an existing campaign, include additional NPCs at the ball who are involved in some way with the PCs' larger goals.

If players are concerned about including children in the game, you can leave them out or use them in a way that ensures they're not put in danger.

Removing the Bind

In order to remove the bind, Aedion needs the PCs to gather the following:

- A snip of King Kol's hair
- A cat's whisker, given freely
- A petal from the Roses of the Guard
- BitterBloom herself

The removal process takes a few minutes and during that time, BitterBloom will try to prevent it due to the effects of the bind.

RESIDENTS AND STAFF

Smoky. This large talking cat seems to believe that she, too, is royalty (and maybe she is). She can usually be found in her room toward the front of the palace or in the storeroom off the kitchen. She knows many of the castle's secrets, and can be coaxed to share one, but only for a price—her favorite rubber fish toy, which was stolen by Alwin a few nights ago.

Smoky and Alwin have a long, ongoing rivalry between them.

Secrets: Extremely flattering portrait, Roses of the Guard, Dumbwaiter

Yes Chef: No one knows his name; everyone just calls him "Yes Chef." He runs the kitchen with a sharp word and a cutting gaze, ensuring that everything is ready on time for the wedding. He does not take kindly to interruptions or anything else that might interfere with the clockwork-like precision of his kitchen. It would take something very special—a secret recipe, a flavor he's never tasted before, and so on—to get him to share a secret with the PCs.

Secret: Dumbwaiter

Alwin. A hue-changing magical octopus who lives in the large tank in the middle of the ballroom, Alwin not only thinks he's the smartest creature in the room—he almost always is. Alwin is also very, very bored. The only reason he hasn't escaped captivity yet is that . . . he has. He escapes every night via a secret door in the top of his tank, and returns every morning, specifically so he may torment Smoky and eat the delicious food that he's served daily.

He has Smoky's rubber fish toy attached to a bone key (it's visible somewhere in his tank). He will give both to the PCs if they agree steal a bag of catnip from the kitchen and give it to Smoky in a place where Alwin can watch the ensuing mayhem. The catnip is located in a locked cabinet in the kitchen. He drops the bone key out through the small hole near the top of his tank.

Secret: Bone key

Smoky: *level 4; persuasion, sneaking, and trickery as level 5*

Alwin: *level 4; can squeeze through gaps the size of a human fist; tentacle slap deals 4 damage*

Bone key, page 47

Yes Chef: *level 3, cooking and intimidation as level 4; carries a carving knife*

Locked cabinet: *level 4; contains one bag of potent catnip and hot cross buns*

HOT CROSS BUNS (CYPHER)

Level: 3

Form: Small spiced cake

Effect: When eaten, restores a number of points equal to the cypher's level to the user's Might Pool.

PALACE MAIN FLOOR

The majority of the main floor is the large, ornate ballroom, which is regally decked out for the ball. There are also various small rooms, especially toward the front of the palace, for sitting and chatting, complete with pillowed benches and lounge chairs. There is also a kitchen, pantry, walled garden, and a hall of treasures.

Tin guard: *level 4; Armor 2; spiked metal fists deal 5 damage*

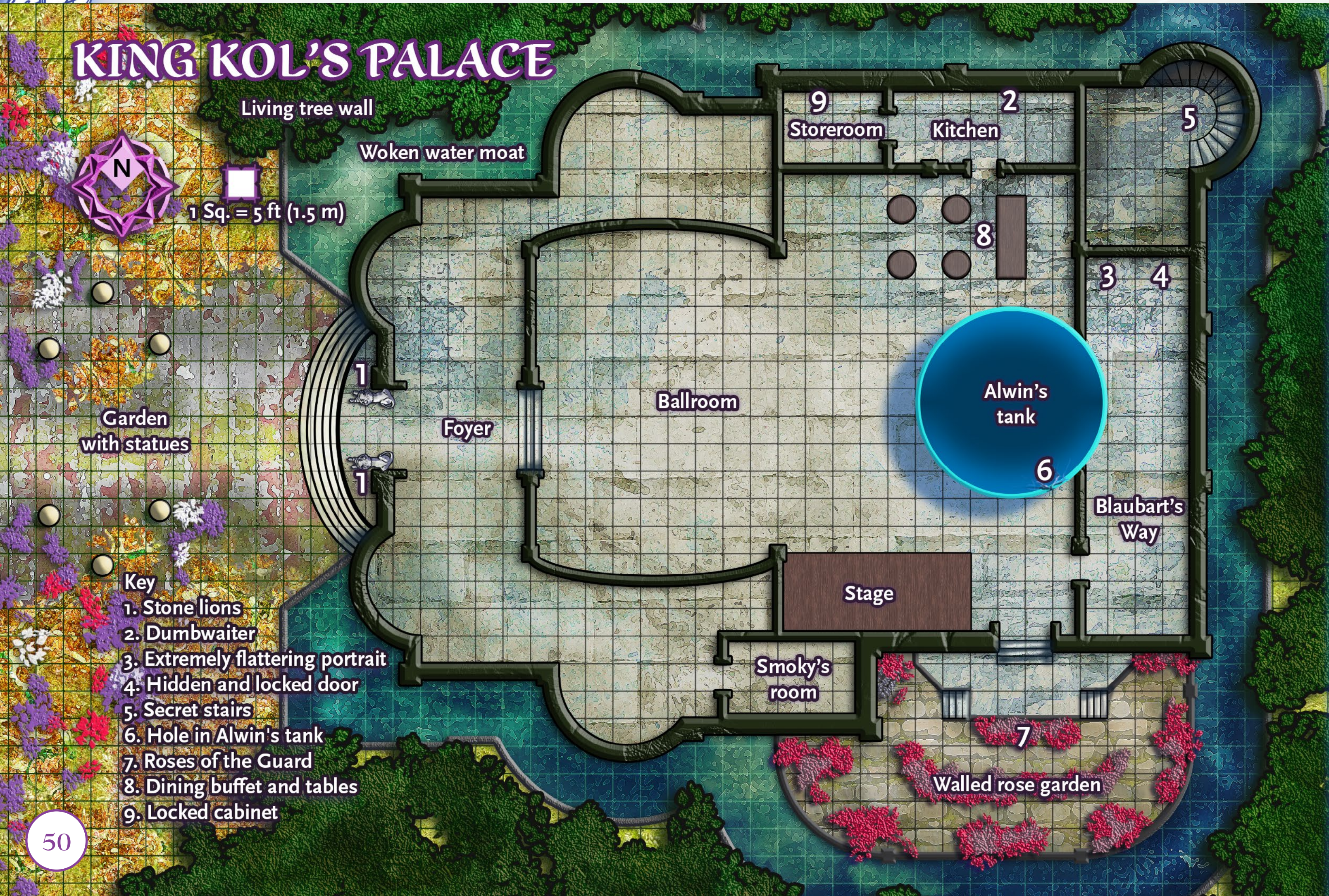
There are tin guards stationed at most of the doorways in the space, including those leading to the kitchen, the walled garden, and Blaubart's Way. The guards look like humanoid soldiers made of tin; they are crafted so that their only purpose is to protect the palace, whether that's from thievery, damage, or other mayhem.

Ballroom. This space includes a large open dance floor; a small, raised stage where the band plays; a large, raised stage where King Kol gives speeches; a round tank with an octopus in it; and two long and large banquet tables as well as smaller tables for seating and eating. The ceiling here is at least 30 feet (9 m) high.

Smoky's room. This room seems rather large for a cat to have to themselves, but it is a palace, after all. In this room, there is a wicker basket of cat toys, as well as a large, cozy bed on a raised table.

Locked cabinet, page 49

Storeroom. A room off the kitchen where various things are stored. The PCs might find Smoky in here, and this is also where the locked cabinet is that contains the catnip.


KING KOL'S PALACE
Living tree wall
Woken water moat
N
1 Sq. = 5 ft (1.5 m)
9
Storeroom
2
Kitchen
5
8
3
4
1
1
Garden with statues
Foyer
Ballroom
Alwin's tank
6
Blaubart's Way
Stage
Smoky's room
7
Walled rose garden
Key
1. Stone lions
2. Dumbwaiter
3. Extremely flattering portrait
4. Hidden and locked door
5. Secret stairs
6. Hole in Alwin's tank
7. Roses of the Guard
8. Dining buffet and tables
9. Locked cabinet

Octopus Tank. Located in the center of the ballroom, this round tank is around 30 feet (9 m) in diameter and extends past the ceiling of the ballroom. It's filled with plants, various hiding spaces for Alwin, shiny objects, and many other things. This is also the location of the bone key.

A small hole near the top of the tank, about the size of a human fist, is the passage Alwin uses to get in and out of the tank. He can also drop objects out of it, or reach out with a tentacle to grab something.

Kitchen. This large, well-stocked kitchen is bustling with cooks, caterers, and other staff members, all under the direction of Yes Chef. There is food everywhere in various stages of production, and the niblings are often running around in here, getting in the way. This is also the location of the dumbwaiter.

Walled Garden. On the other side of the ballroom is the walled garden. You can enter this beautiful, quiet space through a pair of etched-glass doors and step out onto a small patio. All around, flowers of all colors and shapes bend their heads to the breeze. High stone walls surround it, making it seem like its own little world. Along the palace wall, there is a high wooden trellis with the Roses of the Guard.

Hidden among the flowers (a level 4 task to detect) is a single blood pearl blossom.

Additional Details. Feel free to add additional details throughout the ballroom, depending on the mood you're working to create or things the characters might find interesting. And don't be afraid to run with what the PCs come up with. If the PC wants to stuff their pockets with cheese from the buffet to entice Smoky to talk to them, great! Reward their creativity by giving them an asset in the interaction.

Alwin, page 49

Bone key, page 47

Yes Chef, page 49

Niblings, page 48

Dumbwaiter, page 47

Roses of the Guard, page 47

Blood pearl blossom (cypher): *level 6; blood-red flower with a beautiful pearl in its center; when ingested, removes one curse of level 6 or lower from the user, requiring one round to one day, depending on the level, severity, and type of curse*

Blaubart's Way (Hallway of Treasures)

This long hall, located at the back of the palace, is where King Kol keeps all the precious objects he's amassed over the years—or at least the ones that he wishes to show off. Many are artworks or items given to him by fellow rulers, those who seek his favor, or those he's cowed into submission. Some of the artworks have been commissioned by him, while others were stolen by hired hands, or from owners he coerced into giving them up.

This is also the location of the extremely flattering portrait.

Extremely flattering portrait, page 47

The Watchful Crowd. Along the back wall hang half a dozen life-sized and quite lifelike bodies of various sizes, ages, shapes, and genders, dressed in various types of clothing; this is a magically animate creation called the Watchful Crowd. Each figure looks as if it's been hung by the back of its shirt, hood, scarf, or other clothing item, but in fact, the hooks go through their necks and heads. Half are turned to face the wall, while the other half (alternating) face the treasure in the hall. Each holds a large bloody key in their fist.

If someone attempts to steal something from the hall, one of the bodies pulls itself from its hook to defend the item. If one of the bodies dies and the attempted theft continues, another body slides off the wall to defend the item.

Watchful Crowd: *level 3; Armor 1; large bloody key inflicts 3 damage; scream of agony inflicts 3 Intellect damage to anyone who can hear in short range*

The Shoes That Were Danced to Pieces. These tattered blood-spattered slippers rest in an ornate glass box on a pedestal in the middle of the hallway.

Glass box: *level 5; characters who break or move the box must succeed on an Intellect defense task or be cursed. The curse hinders their positive social interactions for a week.*

Other Items in the Hall. You could put any additional item you wish in the hall, including cyphers, artifacts, weapons, books, and treasure. This can be especially handy if you're adding this adventure to an existing campaign and the players are looking for something specific.

THE SHOES THAT WERE DANCED TO PIECES (ARTIFACT)

Level: 5

Form: Tattered crimson slippers with worn soles that adjust to fit the wearer

Effect: Wearer gains an asset for jumping, running, and dancing, but all actions involving hiding and sneaking are hindered.

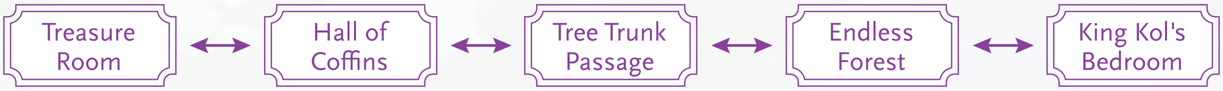
Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (roll each day worn)

PALACE SECOND FLOOR

While much of the first floor is likely navigated via social graces, deals, and detective work, the second floor has much more magic and danger and will probably require the PCs to put hands on their weapons and deal out some damage.

Drawn to the Treasure Room: Thanks to some powerful magic, no matter which path the PCs take to get to the second floor, they end up in the junk treasure room. There is only one route for the PCs to take on this floor.

No Fixed Floorplan: The palace's second floor exists in a somewhat metaphorical space rather than a purely physical one, and as such, there is no fixed map for it. However, exploring PCs can follow the following path between specific areas on the second floor, forward and back:



Treasure Room

The dumbwaiter, secret stairwell, or rose trellis deposits the PCs in the treasure room (they may also enter it from the door in the Hall of Coffins).

This room is stuffed to the gills, but most of it appears to be junk. Rusted armor, moldy books, broken statues—it's as if everything of interest in the kingdom that was broken, misused, or discarded has ended up here. And that's pretty much what happened. For years, in his pursuit of the Elixir of Life, King Kol paid people to bring him anything that "seemed" magical. Some of it ended up in Blaubart's Way, but the rest landed here after King Kol deemed it useless.

Moving through the various objects is a pain because the unorganized piles are always shifting and moving, but it's not terribly difficult. There is a door on the wall opposite the dumbwaiter door. It's not locked, but items from the treasure room spill out when it's opened, creating a ruckus.

Hall of Coffins, page 54

Wall Cabinet, page 56

Treasure Room Valuables

A **green gem** can be found loose amongst the treasure with a successful difficulty 4 perception task. The gem is shaped like a triangle, about two long inches on each side, and the back is flat as if designed to be pressed into something. In fact, the gem is one part of the three-part key needed to unlock the wall cabinet in the King's bedroom.

In addition to the gem, the following cyphers can be found in the treasure room, but each one requires about a minute of searching and a successful difficulty 3 perception task.

JACK'S CANDLESTICK (CYPHER)

Level: 6

Form: Burning candlestick

Effect: Jumping over the candlestick restores 6 points to the user's Speed Pool.

KNAVE OF HEARTS (CYPHER)

Level: 4

Form: Playing card depicting an elegant knight

Effect: Turns the user into the knight depicted on the card. They take on the appearance, voice, and mannerisms of the knight. They also gain +1 Armor, +1 damage inflicted, and an asset in sneaking, hiding, and deceiving. The effect lasts for forty minutes.

VASE OF TEARS (CYPHER)

Level: 5

Form: Vase, vial, or jar filled with tears

Effect: Breaking the vase creates a protective spell around the character, preventing them from taking any Might damage the next time they are physically attacked.

Hall of Coffins

When the PCs leave the treasure room, they find themselves in the hall of coffins. This hall has red velvet wallpaper and a thick red shag carpet. It's about 9 feet (3 m) wide and about 20 feet (6 m) long, and the only things in it are three glass coffins laid end-to-end on pedestals down middle of the hall. The coffins have ornately etched frosted glass on the sides and clear glass tops.

At the end of the hallway is what looks like a large tree trunk embedded in the wall, with a gleaming off-white handle made of bone.

THE COFFINS

It's easy to see into the coffins if someone walks up and peers down because their tops are made of magical glass (but their sides are opaque).

First coffin: *level 5; anyone looking into it must succeed on a level 5 Intellect defense task or they feel like they are somehow both standing outside and stuck inside the coffin at the same time. They can do nothing other than attempt to free themselves from the coffin once each round with another Intellect defense task as their action.*

Wall Cabinet, page 56

First Coffin. Anyone looking into the first coffin sees themself lying in repose inside it, looking exactly as they are currently, including the same outfit. Their own face inside looks up at them and says, "Are you really here?" This coffin is a ward, set up to keep characters here, looking at themselves.

Tree trunk door: *level 8; there is no non-magical way to open it other than to solve the riddle*

Second coffin: *level 5; anyone looking into it causes the replica of King Kol to yell INTRUDERS! over and over and alerts BitterBloom that there's a problem; if PCs attempt to return to the first floor, the replica (level 4) rises and attempts to stop them*

BitterBloom, page 46

Second Coffin. Inside the second coffin is an exact replica of King Kol. When someone looks into the coffin, the coffined King Kol's eyes turn toward them as he studies them carefully. Then he screams INTRUDERS! INTRUDERS!

This coffin is also a ward; in addition to magically alerting BitterBloom that someone has invaded the hall, the replica also rises from its coffin and attempts to keep anyone from returning to the first floor.

Third coffin: *level 5*

Third Coffin. The third coffin has a lock upon its lid, and contains a skeleton covered with dried leaves and bits of twigs, almost like a blanket. It's difficult to see much of the skeleton, but perceptive characters might notice a glint of yellow in its ribcage and a missing shin bone.

GM intrusion: *Someone jostles the first or second coffin, causing it to fall sideways off its pedestal and crack open, activating it as if the character had looked into it.*

The bone handle on the tree trunk matches the color of this skeleton's other bones.

The glint of yellow is a **yellow gem** shaped like an oval. It's about two inches long, and the back is flat as if designed to be pressed into something. It doesn't have any magic of its own, but it is one part of the three-part key needed to unlock the wall cabinet in the king's bedroom.

TREE TRUNK PASSAGE

The large tree trunk in the middle of the wall is actually a door. It has a long, smooth bone for a handle (which originated from the skeleton in the third coffin in the Hall of Coffins). Characters who touch the handle hear a soft eerie voice singing:

A new friend, you've touched my shin
stolen in an act of death and sin
the rest of me lies buried near
and I wish to rest with my soul so dear
take me home and place me within
and I'll open this door and let you in

The shin bone handle comes off easily. Putting the shin bone to rest in its proper place inside the third coffin causes the tree trunk to disappear, leaving a hole in the wall that the PCs can go through.

ENDLESS FOREST

Walking into this space is like stepping directly into a huge, natural forest that goes on and on. All sounds from the rest of the world disappear, and it's possible to hear birds singing, squirrels chittering, leaves falling, and somewhere, far off, water falling from a great height.

There is a path of breadcrumbs to follow, but it seems to lead nowhere and also everywhere. Everything changes, but it also stays the same. This is the magic of the endless forest, and it's designed to disorient and confuse characters long enough for the Woodsman to wake.

THE WOODSMAN

As the characters move along the path, they begin to hear a soft, masculine voice coming out of the woods. The voice seems to be pleading with the characters, saying things like, "Please don't come this way. Please turn back. Please don't make me do this." This is the Woodsman, a character who is under King Kol's spell and must protect the path through the forest. He is, however, sweet of heart and has no wish to harm another living thing.

Eventually, the characters turn down a path to find the Woodsman blocking their way. He is dressed in tattered and torn leathers, carrying a bow, and has a large crimson heart embroidered on his chest.

If the PCs proceed, the Woodsman attacks. Even as he's attacking the PCs, he continues to encourage them to turn around. A flock of crows, all bright red, also joins him, moving as a single creature to attack the characters.

If the Woodsman is killed, he thanks the characters for freeing him, then becomes a red crow who flies off into the woods.

With the Woodsman defeated, PCs who continue down the forest path find that it extends in a straight line all the way to a large wooden door. If opened, this leads to King Kol's bedroom.

Woodsman's Curse

Roll 1d6 to see which curse the character is afflicted with. If the result doesn't make sense (such as a character who is already a bird turning into a bird), reroll or choose another. The curse lasts for a day, but a cursed target can attempt another difficulty 5 Intellect task each round to end the effect.

1. Becomes a talking bird
2. Becomes a talking frog
3. No one else remembers or recognizes the character
4. Grows long and fuzzy rabbit ears
5. Every time they try to talk, it comes out in song
6. Clothing becomes tattered and worn at an alarming speed

GM intrusion: *A tree near the character gets caught up in the Woodsman's binding spell and attempts to prevent the PCs' progress.*

Flock of crows: *level 3, Speed defense as level 5; swarm attacks as one creature, inflicting 3 damage and hindering the foe's tasks for one round*

The Woodsman: *level 5; resists persuasion, coercion, and intimidation as level 7; Armor 1; bow inflicts 4 damage and, on a failed Intellect defense task, the target suffers the Woodsman's Curse*

King Kol's Bedroom

This large, circular bedroom has a red and gold color scheme and is full of lush fabrics and plush sitting spaces.

The room includes a built-in cabinet on one wall.

A large birdcage made of growing vines occupies the room's center; inside is a fox.

There is also a wide bed layered with thick blankets and various pillows. The majority of the walls are covered with mirrors.

WALL CABINET

On one wall, a built-in cabinet features three shapes carved into the front: a triangle, an oval, and a heart. The heart already has a red gem in it. Placing the other two gems in their proper places opens the cabinet door. Inside is an artifact called red cap.

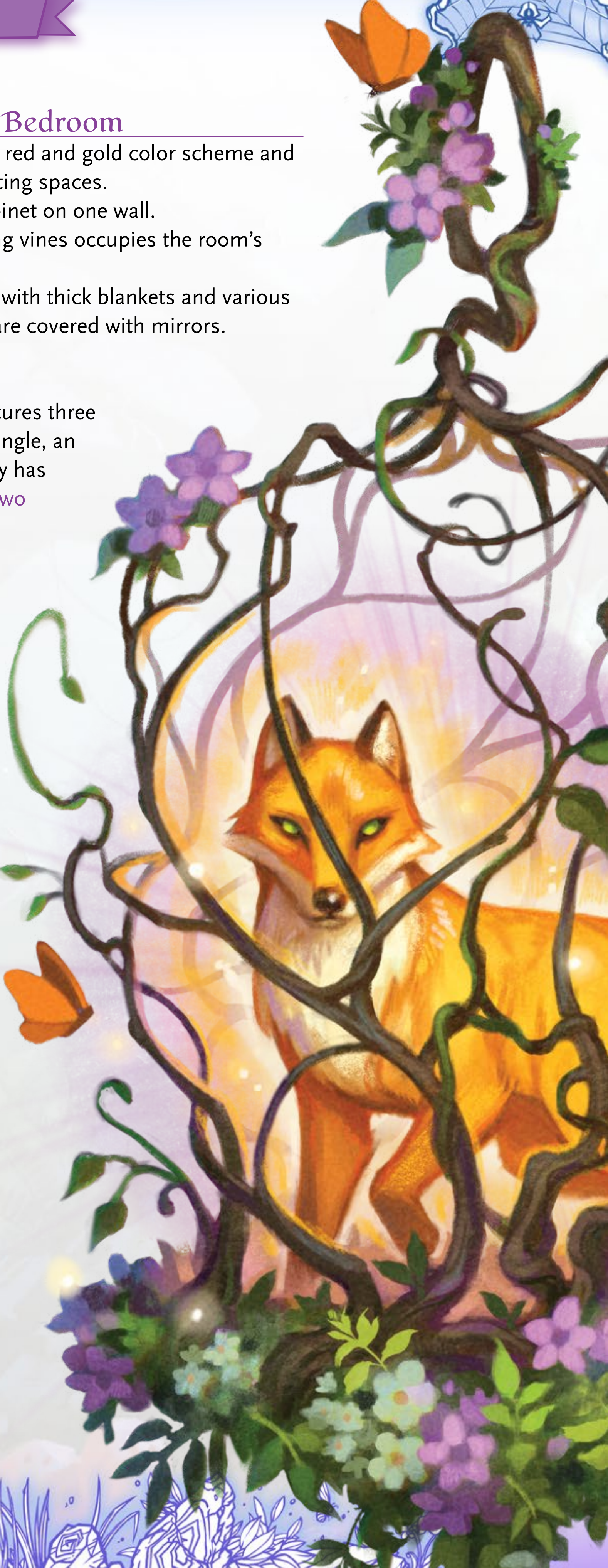
The green gem (page 53) can be found in the treasure vault, and the the yellow gem (page 54) can be found in the Hall of Coffins.

FOX-FIRE AND THE BREATH OF LIFE

In the very middle of the room is an extremely large birdcage made of growing vines. Inside that cage is a small red fox. It's sleeping, with its tail curled around its body and over its nose. When the PCs come in, it likely wakes, blinking in surprise to see the PCs. This creature is Fox-Fire.

Vine cage: *level 3*

GM intrusion: *While the PCs are exploring the room or talking to Fox-Fire, small vines (level 3) start growing out from the cage, attempting to wrap around some part of the nearest characters.*



RED CAP (ARTIFACT)

Level: 9

Form: Woolen cap soaked in human blood

Effect: The wearer gains an extra recovery roll each day that is not an action and does not count toward their daily limit. Once the wearer uses this recovery roll, they can't do so again until after they make a ten-hour recovery roll and soak the hat in fresh human blood.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Fox-Fire is not an artifact, although King Kol certainly refers to it and thinks of it as one (as have many others throughout time, likely). It is, instead, a magical creature who resembles a fox and who can, once per day, create a powerful cypher in the form of a fiery ball called the Breath of Life.

Fox-Fire can use the Breath of Life for itself or it can choose to give it away. Anyone who can trap Fox-Fire can also take the cypher each day and use it for themselves without Fox-Fire's blessing.

Fox-Fire: *level 6; creates a Breath of Life cypher once per day*

SECRET OF FOX-FIRE'S IMPRISONMENT

Many decades ago, King Kol trapped Fox-Fire by capturing its soul and placing it inside a specially-made golden locket. Fox-Fire knows that, but doesn't know that the king gave that locket to Rani, who wears it all the time without knowing what's inside it.

Rani, page 46

If PCs don't make the connection with the golden locket Rani wears on their own, tell one PC that they're reminded of something, and allow them a difficulty 3 Intellect-based task to remember Rani's locket.

In order to free Fox-Fire, the PCs must bring Fox-Fire and the locket together and then open the locket, allowing Fox-Fire's soul to flow back into its body (a process requiring a few rounds). Until then, Fox-Fire cannot leave the palace.

BITTERBLOOM ALERTED

If the PCs activated the replica of King Kol in the Hall of Coffins and did not free BitterBloom from her curse, she appears at the doorway to the bedroom and attempts to keep the PCs from leaving with Fox-Fire.

Hall of Coffins, page 54

BitterBloom, page 46

GM intrusion: *BitterBloom appears, whether or not she was alerted, and attempts to keep the PCs from leaving with Fox-Fire.*

BREATH OF LIFE (CYPHER)

Level: 7

Form: Fiery ball small enough to be held in the palm

Effect: When ingested, removes one curse affecting the user and, if the user's Might Pool or health drops to 0, they recover 3 points per round for the next three rounds; dissipates if not used within a day.

FOX AND CROWS FINALE

Guard: *level 4; Armor 1; armed with sword and bow*

BitterBloom, page 46

GM intrusion: *It takes a few more rounds for Fox-Fire's soul and body to reunite than the PCs expected, allowing more guards to appear, and possibly other allies of King Kol to attempt to stop the process.*

From the king's bedroom, the PCs likely retrace their steps to return to the palace's main floor, assuming they have no magical means to do so.

Some things are changed on their way back through:

- The path through the endless woods is now straight and only about 50 feet (15 m) long.
- In the Hall of Coffins, if the replica of King Kol was not disabled or destroyed previously, it is free of its coffin and attempts to prevent the PCs from leaving.
- The treasure room is clear of junk (except for any cyphers the PCs didn't find or take the first time through).

Ball Is Almost Concluded

King Kol, page 45

Rani, page 46

Elora, page 46

Secret of Fox-Fire's Imprisonment, page 57

Downstairs on the main floor, the wedding ball is drawing to an end, as it's near to midnight. King Kol, Princess Rani, and possibly Elora (if she's not with the PCs) are all up on stage as the king gives another long speech. Princess Rani still wears the golden locket around her neck that holds the secret of Fox-Fire's imprisonment inside.

Last Effort to Stop the PCs

If King Kol discovers what the PCs are doing, he attempts to stop them, calling in three guards to assist.

Princess Rani and Elora aid the PCs, but will not allow the king to be killed or seriously injured. If the PCs have made any allies along the way, they might also attempt to assist.

BitterBloom acts according to her current situation and the status of her bind.

Fox-Fire Freed

If Fox-Fire and its soul are reunited, King Kol visibly changes both physically and mentally, becoming a slightly different person—kinder, more benevolent, and less power-hungry. He may even thank the PCs for helping him see the error of his ways, or promise BitterBloom that he will release her from her bind.

Fox-Fire offers to travel with the PCs of its own free will for a while, if they will have it.

XP for Concluding the Adventure

Award each PC 1 XP if they find Fox-Fire. If they free Fox-Fire without killing the king, they each gain another 2 XP.

CHAPTER 4

BAKE ME ANOTHER BODY

BY SEAN K. REYNOLDS

A NUMENÉRA™ ADVENTURE

CHAPTER 4

BAKE ME ANOTHER BODY

CONTENT WARNING: This adventure deals with frequent character death, multiple dead versions of the PCs, body horror, and vomiting.

"Bake Me Another Body" is a Numenera adventure featuring exploration, prison rescue, character death, and character resurrection, as the PCs try to find who killed them and stole their artifacts. It is suitable for tier 1 or tier 2 characters, although it can be adjusted upward for more powerful characters. The expectation is that this numenera site is especially dangerous and multiple characters will die, but will have new bodies created for them so they can continue.

Ideally, characters are created using *Numenera* rules. If you don't have *Numenera*, ask your players to create fantasy characters with a technology flavor.

Welcome to the Ninth World, page 12

You can download pregenerated first-tier characters for this adventure at: https://mymcg.info/aitcs-pregens

NUMENERA SETTING

In the setting of Numenera, player characters live on Earth a billion years from the present, built on the remnants of eight prior civilizations, each of which rose to the heights of technological mastery, then collapsed after millennia of ascendence. Many of those civilizations had nothing to do with humans. But now in the "Ninth World," humans are back, discovering the wonders of the worlds that came before, not for their own sake, but as the means to improve the present and build a future.

Numenera Discovery

Numenera Destiny

Throughout this adventure, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by these two symbols. These are page references to *Numenera Discovery* and *Numenera Destiny* where you can find additional details about that rule, ability, creature, or concept.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The PCs were exploring a pyramid-shaped ruin when they ran into a hostile and powerful master of prior-world gadgets and "magic" (a nano) named Gullk who was already looting the site. Gullk killed the PCs, but two of Gullk's prisoners were able to remotely activate numenera within the site that created new bodies for the PCs, in effect "resurrecting" them. However, the flesh-baking and mind-transference process is flawed, and the PCs have suffered some memory loss as they appear in their new bodies, so they initially aren't sure what's going on.

The default assumption for this adventure is that the PCs discovered the pyramid, entered it, explored area 10 and found some creatures Gullk had killed, then proceeded to area 11 and got killed by Gullk. They then awaken in the Flesh Oven (area 4) without any memory of the Gullk fight or how they got there, and realize that their cyphers and artifacts are gone. They can then start to explore other areas of the pyramid, and eventually encounter Gullk again and can perhaps try to get their stuff back from him.

OPTIONAL BACKSTORY

If the GM wants to invest extra time to create a more complicated scenario, perhaps the first time the *players* experience their characters awakening in the Flesh Oven isn't the first time the *characters* have been through this loop; the characters have explored more of the ruin, died multiple times, and been rebaked each time and experienced memory loss. For this option, the GM needs to decide what other areas the PCs have explored (and perhaps add more locations branching off of area 2), if they've made any significant changes in their earlier loops (such as killing creatures or salvaging numenera), and where the various earlier body copies are located (their original bodies are in area 11 where Gullk killed them). This setup keeps the novelty of the situation for the players (who are experiencing the flesh-baking for the first time) and adds to the mystery (and horror) as they keep discovering additional PC corpses.

Regardless of whether the GM uses the default assumption or builds out a more complicated option for the characters, other events during the adventure will "backfill" some of the PCs' lost memories and help them understand what happened.

SYNOPSIS FOR THE GM

A group of nano explorers (a human named Gullk, a sentient octopus named Hwaa, and an intelligent automaton named BAB5) discovered and broke into a pyramid-shaped prior-world site.

Upon reaching the hub with a lot of useful numenera, Gullk turned on his companions, imprisoning them and using the numenera to drain their powers so he could fully utilize the site's resources for himself.

Shortly thereafter, the PCs arrived at the site, unaware that Gullk and his former allies were still there. Gullk defeated them and took their cyphers and artifacts, but BAB5 and Hwaa were able to remotely activate some of the site's numenera, "flesh-baking" new bodies for the PCs in the hopes that the PCs would be able to defeat Gullk and free them (the PCs start in area 4).

Area 4, page 67

The PCs explore the ruin (including areas they already cleared out and the rooms where their previous bodies died), eventually reaching Gullk's lair, where they fight him for their stolen items and rescue BAB5 and Hwaa. The flesh-baking technology is still available (but not perfectly reliable), so any time a PCs dies they show up again in the Flesh Oven, giving the PCs opportunities to learn from their mistakes and allowing the GM to not "pull punches" when handling the dangerous encounters of this place.

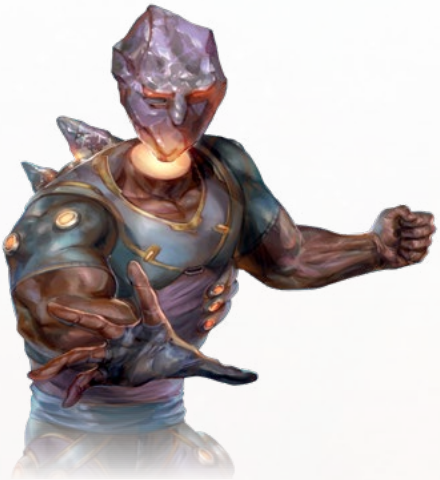
You can change the genders and pronouns of any characters in this adventure without changing the plot or outcome.

Gullk's Lair, page 77

MAJOR NPCs

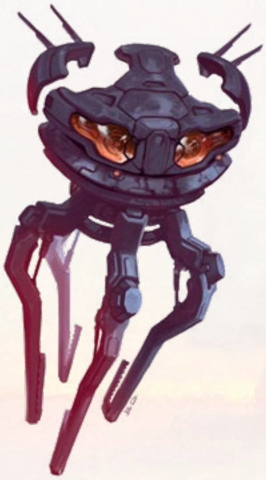
These three NPCs play key roles in the past and present of this adventure; their personalities and motives affect what happens here, even in rooms where they aren't directly involved.

Note: Game stats for Gullk, BAB5, and Hwaa are also found in the section about Gullk's Lair.



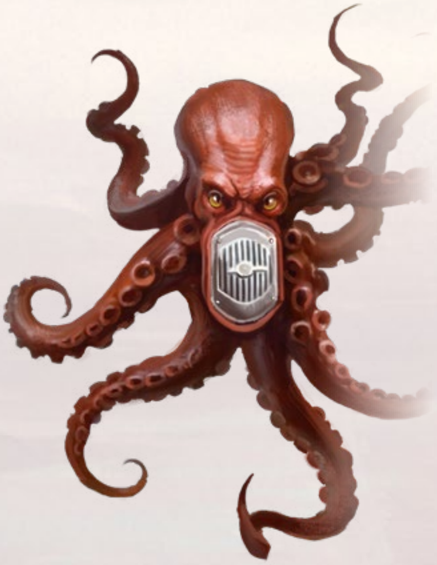
GULLK

A tall, muscular man with skinny legs and a floating chunk of purple crystal where his head should be. He is almost certainly a sociopath: personable when he chooses to be, ruthless when he sets his mind on a goal, and more than willing to betray others (even his friends) if doing so advances his aims and doesn't cause him significant consequences. The availability of this site's numenera (so similar to his own) triggered his greedy impulses, and he betrayed his companions in order to take these rewards for himself. He has been spending the past few days doing a "deep delve" into the powers of this site, incorporating its numenera into himself and discovering ways to draw power from its installations.



BAB5

An automaton accidentally granted intelligence by a quirk of a numenera upgrade to its mechanisms. BAB5 (pronounced either "Babs" or "BAB-five," it answers to both) has a metal interior, a glossy black synth shell, and a rounded trilaterally-symmetric body plan dotted with large lights. BAB5 is dependable, quick-witted, and stealthy. Although it is still learning about its sapience, emotions, and the strange divide between its conscious and subconscious thinking (including dreams), it recognizes and appreciates positive feelings of companionship, and it calls Hwaa a friend (and perhaps more . . .).



HWAA

An intelligent human-sized octopus who emerged from a stasis pod a decade ago with few memories of his past other than an awareness that he was in stasis for a very long time. Hwaa has an affinity for machines and devices of all kinds (similar to a PC with the Fuses Mind and Machine focus). Hwaa and BAB5 have been friends for a year, and recently Hwaa has realized that he's in love with BAB5. If freed from Gullk's imprisonment he'll confess his feelings to BAB5.

PLOT HOOKS

If "explore and salvage valuable items" isn't enough of a motivation for the PCs to enter this site, the GM can choose from the following plot hooks to give the players an immediate reason to participate in this adventure. (Of course, these reasons don't initially matter when the PCs awaken in the Flesh Oven, as their reason for being here was already decided by their past selves, and forgotten due to the memory loss incurred in the flesh-baking process.)

- In trying to decipher the abilities of an odd crystal-based numenera, the PCs were directed to find a nano named Gullk, whose own crystalline augmentations may give him unusual insight.
- The PCs need to interact with one or more psychic octopi (perhaps from Eldan Firth), but their species' different outlooks and communication styles make things difficult. A land-walking octopus nano named Hwaa knows how to speak Truth and might be available to facilitate understanding; he and his companions were last seen heading toward a settlement near this numenera ruin.
- A recent encounter with the iron wind has harmed or mutated a close friend of the PCs. A psychic automaton named BAB5 is said to be somewhat of an expert on the iron wind and may know how to cure the PCs' friend; it and two nanos are supposedly tracking something interesting in the vicinity of this numenera site.
- A horde of dangerous ultraterrestrials is approaching a nearby settlement, and the PCs believe that numenera within this ruin might be the key to creating a large shield against these multidimensional foes.

Eldan Firth, page 166

Iron wind, page 135

Ultraterrestrials are creatures from another dimension (as opposed to extraterrestrials, which are creatures from another planet).

PCs AND FREE WILL

Note that once the PCs leave a Flesh Oven, they don't have to follow the same path they took before (if they remember it at all). Some players may be unnerved when their characters find the recent carnage from earlier attempts, especially if the corpses of their previous bodies are especially gruesome, and they may turn back to attempt a different way through the facility. They may even choose to leave the site entirely, at the prospect of seeing another way they previously died. They may encounter a powered-up Gullk much later in their explorations, finally triggering (as a group GM intrusion) the memory flashback of him killing them.

If the PCs leave the pyramid and encounter Gullk months or years later (when he is more powerful), he might not even remember meeting and killing them because so much time has passed.

PCs AND THEIR ARTIFACTS

If the GM is running this adventure as a one-shot or is otherwise using brand-new characters (either homemade or premade PCs), it creates a minor complication that starting characters (especially premade characters for convention scenarios) don't have artifacts and therefore have less of an incentive to go after Gullk. After all, the characters may not have a strong attachment to any cyphers he took from their dead bodies, but an artifact is something worth trying to reclaim (even more so for a tier 1 character).

To help motivate the players, here are a couple of artifact suggestions for each character type; the GM should pick one that's suitable for each character in the group and let the player know they remember having this item before their memories stopped. The players should realize these items have been taken from them (although they may grossly misjudge the circumstances of how it happened) and want to recover them.

Obviously, the PCs don't have their artifacts, but they recall what advantages they provided, as follows.

Character Type	Suggested Artifacts
Arkus	Cloak of finery: eases interaction tasks Poison brain implant: psychically attacks target who attempts mental contact or attack with character
Delve	Nightvision goggles: see in the dark Multi-opener: opens locked objects
Jack	Bounding boots: eases running and jumping tasks Chameleon cloak: eases hiding and sneaking tasks
Nano	Brain bud: +5 to Intellect Kinetic shield: eases Speed defense against projectiles and +1 to Armor against the same
Warrior	Healing sword: heals wielder Living armor sheath: +2 Armor, eases Might defense against poison and disease
Wright	Cellular annealer: moves target within short range one step up damage track Temporary wing: wearer can fly for an hour

Cellular annealer, page 187

Cloak of finery, page 188

Multi-opener, page 190

Temporary wing, page 192

Bounding boots, page 293

Brain bud, page 293

Chameleon cloak, page 293

Healing sword, page 296

Kinetic shield, page 297

Living armor sheath, page 298

Nightvision goggles, page 299

Poison brain implant, page 299

THE PYRAMID

From the outside, this ruin looks like a heavily weathered triangular pyramid made of dark red glass with circular panels of white marbled stone. Several times per day, some of the stone panels farthest from the ground eject plumes of steam, or sometimes dense clouds of ash that change directions several times like flocks of birds before fading away (this is a weird side effect of the numenera here, but doesn't play a part in the events of this adventure). One face of the pyramid has a narrow triangular aperture (about the height of a doorway) lined with pale lavender natural crystals; this is the only entrance to the site.

Unless otherwise stated, the pyramid, its structural materials, and the effects it generates are level 6.

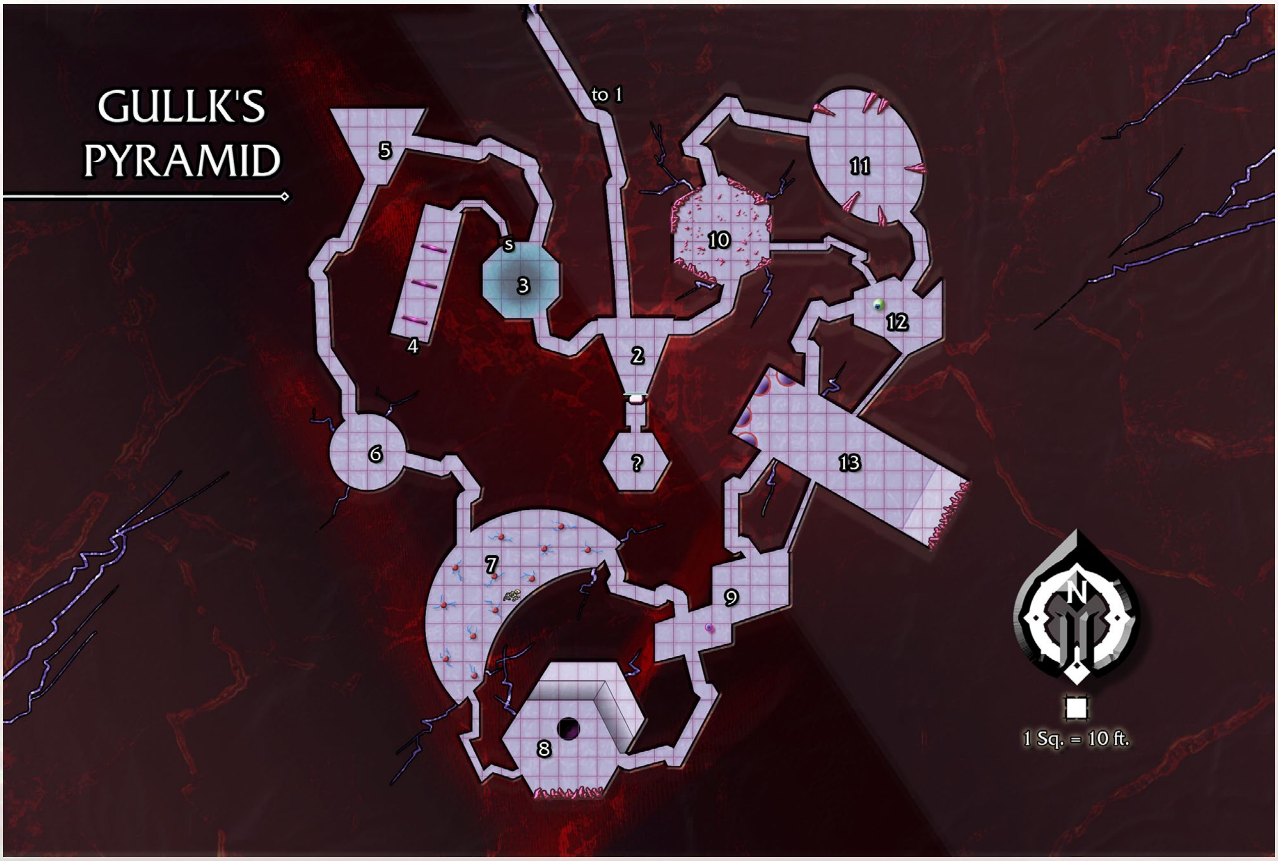
> *A triangular pyramid's base has three sides, like a d4, rather than a square pyramid with four sides, like the Great Pyramid of Giza.*

MULTIDIMENSIONAL SHIMMERS

The inside of the pyramid is traced with overlapping trans-dimensional energy fields. Sometimes the interactions of these fields create a visible shimmer in the air or on a flat surface, somewhat resembling circuitry or a detailed map of a river delta. These energy fields and their shimmers don't have a constant effect, although they might prompt a GM intrusion usable in any location within the pyramid.

Multidimensionality GM intrusion: *The shimmers become acutely visible to the character, and suddenly they almost seem to make sense. If the character uses an action to study the shimmers, they can attempt a difficulty 6 Intellect-based task; success means they gain a bit of insight about something in the room (an asset on their next interaction with it). Otherwise, the character is distracted (tasks are hindered) as long as they remain in that location.*

If the multidimensionality aspect of this site is too confusing or complicated for anyone at the table, feel free to ignore it and its distracting patterns.



Memory GM intrusion: *The character loses their next turn as they suddenly recall a vivid memory of something they experienced within the pyramid—perhaps a glimpse of what Gullk looks like, or a detail about a previous encounter in their current location. The memory is imperfect, but it might provide an insight or advantage about something here (such as a device or creature), easing one relevant task.*

At some point while they're exploring the pyramid, the PCs should have a group GM intrusion where they all experience a flashback of their battle with Gullk. If they don't experience this flashback before reaching area 11, it happens there.

The Gullk Flashback, page 75

Force field: *level 9; if damaged it moves one step up the object damage track each round*

Object damage track, page 116

A vertice (VER-tih-see) is a place where creatures in the physical world can enter the datasphere and creatures in the datasphere can enter the physical world. For more information about the datasphere and vertices, refer to Numenera *supplements* Voices of the Datasphere *and* Vertices.

Dread destroyer, page 234

Clock of Kala, page 206

Vebar, page 195

More information on the Moon and its inhabitants is available in Into the Night, *a supplement for* Numenera.

MEMORY FLASHBACKS

While in this ruin, the PCs experience at least one death, have a new body "baked" for them, and have their consciousness transferred into this new body. The transfer process is imperfect, and the PCs lose some short-term memories every time it happens. As they re-explore areas they've already visited, they may experience a flashback of their previous visit to that location as a GM intrusion.

1. PYRAMID ENTRANCE

If the PCs are approaching this area from the outside, they see a narrow triangular aperture on the exterior face of the glassy pyramid, lined with pale lavender crystals. Beyond it is a passage only slightly wider than the opening. Scattered along the passage floor are several broken pieces of white marbled stone, similar to the circular stone panels on the outside of the pyramid.

If the PCs come here from area 2, the hallway they pass through narrows, most noticeably at the top, becoming more like a triangle in cross-section than a rectangle. Up ahead, several broken pieces of white marbled stone rest flat on the floor. Beyond them is a triangular opening that leads outside.

The broken pieces of stone were previously affixed at the end of the tunnel like a door or seal, but when Gullk arrived he smashed them open with his telekinesis and dropped them on the floor so they wouldn't block the hallway. (If reassembled, the broken pieces would be a snug fit in the doorway, but would quickly fall out if not secured in place somehow.)

There is enough stone dust and tiny pieces of rubble here to reveal Gullk's footprints and Hwaa's arm-prints (BAB5 flies, so it leaves no trail). If the PCs passed through here, their tracks are visible, too, partially obscuring the earlier tracks.

2. TRIGONAL HUB

This triangular room has four exits—one in each corner, and a narrow one in the middle of one of the walls. One corner exit is blocked by white marbled stone and a faintly shimmering force field. Another corner exit smells damp. The third corner smells like the lair of a large beast. The doorway in the wall has a faint breeze and smells like natural outside air.

The damp exit leads to the Wet Room (area 3), the beast-smelling exit leads to the Tube Screamer Nest (area 10), and the narrow opening in the wall leads to the Pyramid Entrance.

The force field blocking the remaining exit was enough to deter Gullk for a while; he and his group opted to explore other parts of the ruin, with the intent of returning later (perhaps after finding the means to deactivate it). What's beyond it is left for the GM to expand upon, should the PCs manage to remove or bypass the barrier. Here are some suggestions for what could be there:

- Strong connection to the datasphere, such as numenera that the PCs can manipulate to get questions answered, or perhaps even a vertice
- Additional levels of the pyramid, with sphere-automatons being the default guardians
- Prison cell or stasis chamber for a large, dangerous creature, dead for a very long time
- Beacon to summon a dread destroyer
- Teleporter to an interesting but dangerous place, such as the Clock of Kala, a pool of fluid outside of Vebar, or the Moon

Been Here Before? If the GM is adding additional PC deaths that the players don't remember, this room could have a PC corpse cut into slices and piled up in front of the force field.

3. WET ROOM

The floor here is gently concave, like a giant bowl, and filled with clear, ankle-deep water. The three exits are set a step above the waterline, connecting to smooth glass hallways.

If the PCs arrived here by coming down the slide from the Flesh Oven (area 4), they entered through a hidden fourth exit—a short wide secret panel that pops open to deposit them into the water (taking no damage). The panel slowly closes after a character exits the slide, becoming flush with the wall and hard to find (from this side) without searching for it. If the PCs come to this area from somewhere other than the Flesh Oven, the panel is probably closed.

The water is tepid (not cold), safe to drink, and harmless. If befouled, numenera in the pyramid clean it over the span of several hours.

Panel: *level 4 to find*

4. FLESH OVEN

This is the room with complicated numenera that can recreate living physical bodies (a process similar to realscribing). In addition to the flesh-baking device, other numenera telekinetically push the new body out of the way and into the slide leading to area 3 (more information about these things is available below).

What the PCs see and experience here depends on if this is their first time here or if they've been here before.

Realscribing is the process that converts a creature's digital avatar in the datasphere into a physical body in the real world. For more information about realscribing and the datasphere, check out the Numenera supplement Voices of the Datasphere.

FIRST BODY TRANSFER

If this is the first time the players experience their characters being transferred into fresh-baked bodies, read or summarize the following information.

READ-ALOUD

> You awaken—groggy, nauseous, your chest congested as if from a bad cold—to the sensation of movement and a gentle pressure all over your body like you're being held by a giant, soft hand. A moment later, you feel yourself sliding down a steep slope and tumbling to rest in shallow water in a bright room with a hard floor. The unexpected motion makes your guts lurch, and you have to spend a few moments retching and coughing up some strange fluids. You don't know where you are or how you got here.

(Technically, the first half of the read-aloud happens in area 4, but the slide dumps them into area 3.)

Creating a body takes about an hour, although the machine can create multiple bodies at once (thus, any deceased PCs wake up here at basically the same time). The flesh-baking process uses inert fluids to hold internal organs and structures in place until the baking is finished (similar to a modern 3D printer using support struts to hold pieces in place until the connecting structures get printed). The fluid is harmless, but expelling it from the character's stomach and lungs is uncomfortable and alarming—the various fluids are beige, sky blue, and bright yellow, nothing you'd normally find inside a human's body.

Varjellen, lattimors, and PCs of other nonhuman species might naturally have fluids of these colors and react differently to seeing their colors than a human would. Inorganic PCs such as automatons may or may not even need the support fluids during the flesh-baking process.

Once the PCs have expelled the excess fluids and can take the time to look around, they realize their cyphers and artifacts are missing, although they have all of their other equipment (including any numenera that's permanently part of their bodies, which for some characters might be the source of their type or focus abilities). Furthermore, they don't have clear memories of what they were doing right before they appeared in the other room (depending on the GM's decision for playing through this

If the PCs normally use chalk or markers to leave notes in places they explore (warning about hazards, advice for activating panels, and so on), the GM should feel free to add these details (in a PC's handwriting) to the description of any room they had time to make notes in. Likewise, areas they visited earlier can have evidence of other cyphers they've used, such as an expended device or an ongoing effect like a long-duration force field.

Telekinetic ceiling nodule: *level 6; "attacks" up to four creatures each round; attacked creature must succeed at a Might-based task or be pushed sideways up to a short distance into the exit slide to area 3*

If bloodstains, spilled baking fluids, and other messes disappear in between visits by the PCs because the GM forgets to mention them, that's okay. The pyramid has tiny harmless automatons here that clean up such things over time.

Cosmetic mutation, page 402

Harmful mutations, page 398

Distinctive mutations, page 400

adventure, the last thing they remember might be the outside of the pyramid or one of the early interior areas).

If the PCs look around after being pushed into the slide to the Wet Room, jump to that entry and describe it to them.

Full Pools: Freshly baked PCs have full Pools, which means savvy PCs with strong stomachs might eventually decide to use the numenera as a method to "heal" themselves relatively quickly. Of course, doing so would require their former selves leaving a message explaining the situation and that, to capitalize on their fresh bodies, they'll have to act quickly while Gullk is still hurt.

SECOND AND LATER BODY TRANSFERS

If this isn't the first time the players are experiencing this flesh-baking process, they once again wake up in the Flesh Oven with no idea how they got there. They still feel congestion in their chest and an upset stomach, although this time it's less disorienting. They're also unsurprised when, a moment later, they start to feel the familiar all-over pressure attempting to move them.

This time the characters can take an action before they get pushed into the slide that carries them to area 3. However, until they use an action to purge themselves of the flesh-baking fluids inside them (which happened reflexively the first time they were here), all their tasks are hindered.

The round after the PCs become awake, the telekinetic ceiling nodule attempts to push them into the slides (it keeps trying to do this every round until it is destroyed or the PCs find a way to deactivate it). Meanwhile, the flesh-baking rings reabsorb any "spilled" flesh-baking fluids for sterilization and reuse in the next bake.

The characters awakening here means they have lost any cyphers and artifacts, but once again have full Pools.

FLESH-BAKING FLAWS

The "baking" process that creates new bodies for dead PCs wasn't designed with humans or human-like creatures in mind, and the machinery is very old, so mistakes can happen. Usually this is just something minor—about half of all baked bodies have a cosmetic mutation (although it's not technically a mutation affecting the character's genes, it's just an error in the body-creation process). However, as a GM intrusion they may experience a more radical body alteration.

Damage to at least one numenera ring means that recreated bodies are always flawed (no GM intrusion necessary); the character's new body gains a harmful mutation on a 1–4 on a d6 or a distinctive mutation on a 5–6. If at least two rings are damaged or destroyed, the body has a harmful mutation on a 1–5 on a d6 and a distinctive one on a 6. If all three are damaged, any baked body here automatically gains a harmful mutation. If all three are destroyed, baking can't occur at all.

ROOM EXPLORATION

If the PCs have time to look around and explore this room (such as if they move up the slide in area 3 to look around here), they notice that the walls, floor, and ceiling are made of a dark red glass. Three oval-shaped rings of rough amethyst-like crystal hover in the air, arranged in formation like a tube that has been sliced into segments. Each ring faintly crackles with energy. A large crystalline nodule embedded in the ceiling gently throbs with pale light. On one end of the room, a low rectangular aperture at floor level connects to a smooth tunnel that curves away and downward.

If the PCs destroy or salvage the telekinetic ceiling nodule, it can no longer push them out of the room, and any later times they body-transfer they will remain in the Flesh Oven until they leave voluntarily.

Note that Gullk doesn't know about this area—his group passed through area 3, didn't notice the secret panel with access to the slide, and continued on to area 5. Because he's not aware of the body-transferring numenera here, the reappearance of the "dead" PCs is a complete surprise to him.

5. GUARDIAN SPHERES

Three smooth amethyst spheres, each about the size of a human torso, spin in place in one corner near a destroyed automaton made of jagged metal and rough crystal.

The amethyst spheres are automatons; once the PCs come into view, the spheres switch their spinning axes from vertical to horizontal and roll forward at high speed to attack. They pursue intruders into area 3 or 6; for a few hours after the PCs enter this area, the spheres patrol between areas 3, 5, and 6, immediately attacking if they discover the PCs again.

The destroyed automaton seems to have been wrecked by a combination of force blasts and being torn apart by telekinetic force. (Gullk destroyed it when he, BAB5, and Hwaa first arrived here.) It's already been salvaged; trying to salvage it again is hindered by two steps (the normal penalty for doing so).

Amethyst spheres (3): *level 6; Armor 3; attacks by rolling up to a short distance and colliding with a foe, inflicting 6 damage and knocking them prone on a failed Might defense roll*

Destroyed automaton: *level 6 (destroyed)*

Crystal rings: *level 6*

The three flesh-baking rings are designed to specialize in different kinds of baking (for humans, one mostly does the hard organic materials such as bones and teeth, one does the living soft tissues, and the third creates synth, metal, and nonliving organic materials such as hair, cloth, and leather), but are redundant enough that they can still function if only one of them remains. However, if one or more are damaged (or salvaged), the chances of flesh-baking flaws increase.

The rings create normal clothing, so the PCs don't awaken naked.

Finding and identifying cyphers, page 274

GM INTRUSION: A BIG RESET

At any time, the GM can use a group GM intrusion where the PCs suddenly find themselves awakening in the Flesh Oven again, with their last memory being whatever was happening before the intrusion—they may have been walking down a hallway, reacting to an ambush, dealing with an active combat encounter, or even resting. The GM should assume that the PCs were killed again and had to be rebaked. As with other body transfers, they lose their cyphers and artifacts (which might still be in the room they last visited). The GM should decide what happened between the last thing the PCs remember and the actual time of death, where the PC bodies are, and the state of any other nearby areas (such as activated devices, injured or killed creatures, and so on).

Use this GM intrusion only once while at this site, just so the players don't become frustrated about multiple failures to make progress that are beyond their control.

GM intrusion: *The character is slammed into another character, knocking both of them prone. A character can use their action to extricate themselves from the jumble, or do so as part of another action if they succeed at a level 4 Speed-based task.*

6. VENTILATION TUBES

The only significant feature of this round area are three small holes near the ceiling, each about a hand's width across, extending into the wall like a tube or pipe. They appear to be a deliberate part of the structure, not the result of damage or neglect.

SMALL HOLES

The holes near the ceiling circulate fresh air throughout the pyramid; the PCs can feel the air moving once they're close enough to touch the holes. These connect several rooms throughout the structure, but they're impassable to the PCs without shrinking, turning into gas, or similar abilities.

However, the tubes are also used by local opportunistic predators (called tube screamers) to travel freely among many of the areas in this ruin. Within a few minutes of the PCs reaching this area, two tube screamers emerge from the holes and attack.

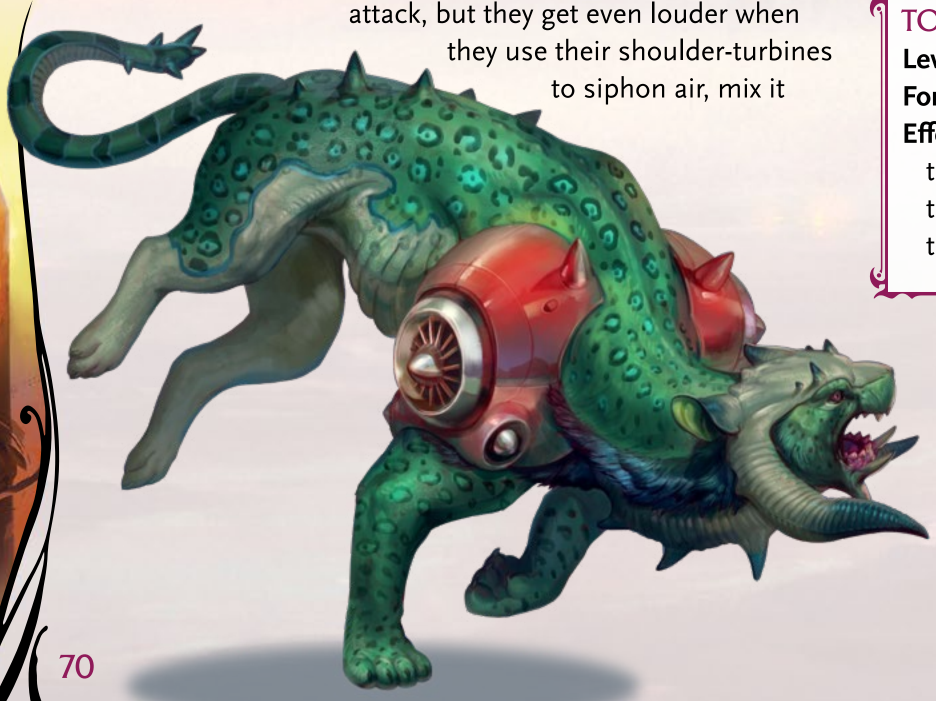
Tube screamer: *level 5, Speed defense as level 6 due to quickness and instantaneous squeezing; Armor 2 (5 against fire); bite inflicts 5 damage; once every couple of rounds can expel a cone of fire in an adjacent immediate area that inflicts 9 damage on a failed Speed defense roll or 2 on a successful one*

TUBE SCREAMERS

These feline creatures are a little smaller than a ravage bear, with green fur and an ovoid metal object growing out of each shoulder. They make loud high-pitched vocalizations when they attack, but they get even louder when they use their shoulder-turbines to siphon air, mix it with organic fuel their bodies produce, and ignite it to create a blast of flame like a jet engine. They can squeeze themselves down as part of their movement (or use this squeezing to help dodge an attack) and easily pass through the ventilation tubes.

Although they have a nest in area 10, Gullk killed two of them there when he passed through, so the remaining creatures have been spending more time in other parts of the pyramid. They are aggressive and fierce, but flee if both are heavily injured or one is killed. After they've retreated and had time to lick their wounds, they may come after the PCs again via the tubes or the normal hallways.

There are a total of four tube screamers living in the pyramid. Once the PCs defeat all four, no more will appear here. Some (about half) of the slain screamers can be salvaged for one cypher.



Been Here Before? If the GM is adding additional PC deaths that the players don't remember, this room could have a scorched PC corpse with some lootable equipment and perhaps an unused cypher: a toxic fogger.

TOXIC FOGGER (CYPHER)

Level: 5

Form: Backpack with hose sprayer

Effect: As part of another action, the user can activate the cypher to gain one additional action this turn.

7. SNAKE CABLES

This curved room has about a dozen glassy nodules affixed to the ceiling, with a long blue cable made of synth dangling from each of them, hanging most of the way to the floor. Along the far wall is a clothed skeleton, probably of a human or near-human creature. On the wall above the skeleton is some sort of device or marking, but the dangling cables mostly block it from view.

DANGLING CABLES

The cables remain inert until a creature enters the room, at which time they begin to reach forward as if wanting to touch the creature. The cables can elongate to reach anywhere within the room or an immediate distance into the hallway, but it takes them about a round to "wake up" and start this process. They attack in groups, acting as four separate creatures with multiple grasping limbs. If salvaged, each "creature" contains enough semi-elastic synth fibers to create about 25 feet (8 m) of strong (level 4) synth rope; alternatively, if the GM is using iotum salvaging options from *Numenera Destiny*, salvaging the cables gives the PCs four units of pliable metal.

SMALL HOLES

Although the characters can't see them with the snake cables in the way, the two far corners near the ceiling have a couple more of the small ventilation holes. The tube screamers avoid this area unless the snake cables are destroyed or neutralized, but may show up if the characters deal with the cables and decide to rest here. The screamers also might dash in to drag away and eat the body of a creature killed by the cables.

SKELETON

The dead creature's flesh rotted away long ago, leaving its bones and hardier equipment. It's about the same size as an average human, with a hunched spine, large eye sockets, a beak-like nose bone, and only four fingers on each hand. Several arrows pierce its chest. Among the remnants of its clothing are a heavy synth belt, two stronglass knives, a cracked major glowglobe (only lasts about ten hours), 15 shins, and a gravity nullifier (level 8).

On the wall above the skeleton is something that initially looks like a sculpture of a three-armed humanoid creature emerging from the wall (made from the same glassy material as much of the pyramid). Closer scrutiny reveals that it's not a separate object—it's integrated into the wall, as if a glass creature were embedded within and trying to extricate itself. There is no way to remove the "creature" from the wall, and there is no numenera involved.

If the PCs have ever encountered a murden, the skeleton is similar to a murden's skeleton, but not quite the same.

Murden, page 243

Cable snakes (4): *level 6, attacks as level 5; grapple attack squeezes for 2 damage, plus 2 damage from electrocution, and holds the target in place on a failed Might defense roll*

Stronglass, page 94

Glowglobe, page 98

Gravity nullifier, page 280

15 shins is about the equivalent of a very expensive item.

Pliable metal, page 112

The skeleton is of a mutant human or perhaps an unknown (to the PCs) humanoid species living in the Ninth World. Alternatively, if PCs have encountered abhumans near the pyramid, the GM can change it to an abhuman skeleton.

8. HEXAGONAL RAMP ROOM

This hexagonal room has a large hole in the center of the floor, one wall covered in crystalline structures, and two walls with platforms and ramps that slope down toward the central hole. On top of each platform is a smooth amethyst sphere about the size of a human torso, spinning in place. Two of the walls also have smaller holes near the ceiling.

The two amethyst spheres are automatons similar to the ones in area 5; the main difference is that these are a bit larger, and they actually push their foes instead of just knocking them down. Once they spot intruders, they roll forward at high speed to attack, preferably trying to knock foes into the large hole in the floor. They pursue intruders out into the hallways, but not into other rooms.

Been Here Before? If the GM is adding additional PC deaths that the players don't remember, this room could have a PC corpse smashed against one wall (with their equipment and cyphers destroyed), or a dead PC at the bottom of the hole (perhaps having an intact cypher: a stasis pod).

Forceful amethyst spheres: *level 6; Armor 3; initial attack is eased by rolling down the ramp; attacks by rolling up to a short distance and colliding with a foe, inflicting 6 damage and pushing them up to an immediate distance on a failed Might defense task*

Bloody bowels: *level 5; character touching the contaminated water must make a Might defense roll (hindered if they swallow the water or allow it to touch their wounds) or be infected; infected character's maximum Might Pool decreases by 1 each day and the character must succeed at a Might defense roll or move one step down the damage track; two successful defense rolls in a row cures the disease*

Stasis pod: *level 6 cypher; handheld device; willing target enters perfect stasis until device removed*

Wall numenera: *level 6 (two sources)*

FLOOR HOLE

The hole in the floor is about 10 feet (3 m) across, with a smooth lip and edges. It extends downward about 40 feet (12 m). At the bottom is an ankle-high layer of broken crystals of the same type as on the wall, ending just below a series of ventilation tubes. Everything is covered in dirty, slimy water, created by moisture drawn here by the ventilation system. Anyone who falls down the hole takes 4 points of ambient damage (ignores Armor) from the fall, an additional 2 points of damage from broken crystal shards, and is exposed to a waterborne disease called bloody bowels. Although the tube screamers can access the bottom of the hole (as well as the main room), they avoid it unless they notice a dying or recently dead character here.

CRYSTAL WALL

The wall is numenera that slowly grows the crystals used in other parts of this ruin. It is currently paused, as it has covered its entire surface to about the depth of an extended finger, and won't start growing more unless enough crystals are removed (whether carefully or violently) to expose some of the underlying numenera, taking about a day to regrow 1 square yard (1 m²) of material. The numenera in the wall can be salvaged as two separate sources of numenera, but only if at least an hour is spent removing the surface crystals (which may mean hungry tube screamers wander by and attack).

"We thlipsids often barter with human-kind. Our devices allows you to alter time—at least, according to how you understand time—letting you briefly act twice as fast as normal. Do you wish to trade?"

9. TIME TRADERS

This long room bends in two places, creating a pair of nearly separated wings. In one of them, three humanoid creatures huddle together over a short crystalline pillar. Each wears a heavy cloak and metallic mask that don't entirely conceal that their limbs and faces are augmented with numenera. In the other niche is a windowlike vertical aperture looking into another area.

This room is generally safe.

HUMANOIDS

The three creatures are thlipsids—entities with the power to alter and condense time, including compressing units of time into small tokens that can be used like cyphers. They are only stopping by this site and this specific area out of curiosity, and have no interest in whatever Gullk is doing (or in stopping him), but are open to bargaining with the PCs. They can offer the PCs as many compressed time cyphers as the characters can carry, in exchange for shins (30 per cypher), chunks of time in the PCs' future (one instance per cypher), or cyphers the PCs have (trading them one-for-one). This is an opportunity for the PCs to gain cyphers up to their limit or exchange non-combat cyphers for something that'll help in the upcoming fight against Gullk.

The thlipsids don't know anything about Gullk and don't have any insight about the local numenera, including the crystal pillar (they had only started to examine it when the PCs arrived). They looked through the "window" only once and decided to stay out of view from its connected room. They aren't interested in conversation other than to trade with the PCs, and seem casually threatening (mostly due to their strange posture, movements, and augmentations) when not buying or selling.

If the thlipsids are threatened or attacked, or if creatures from elsewhere in the pyramid enter this area (such as roving tube screamers arriving through the normal hallways), they alter time in order to take three movement actions in one turn, allowing them to escape the encounter and then leave the pyramid (to the PCs, it looks like they run out of the room almost too quickly to see). They do not return to this area, but the PCs might encounter them again someday.

THLIPSID-COMPRESSED TIME (CYPHER)

Level: 1d6 + 1

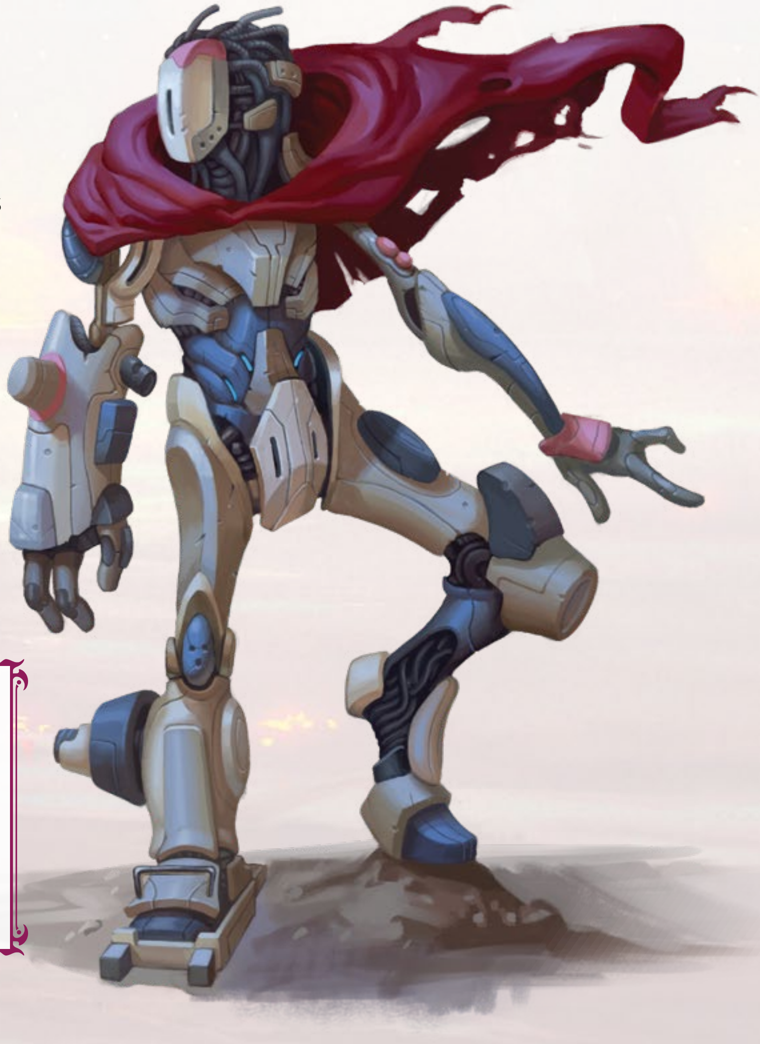
Form: Small metallic token

Effect: As part of another action, the user can activate the cypher to gain one additional action this turn.

A PC who trades some of their future time for a thlipsid's cypher doesn't know when that lost time will occur; the GM should use a GM intrusion at some later point in the campaign, freezing the character in place for a full minute, during which time they can't act or be acted upon.

Thlipsid, page 279

Thlipsid: *level 5, temporal knowledge as level 8; Armor 2; can take 3 actions every other turn; touch freezes target in time for one minute on failed Speed defense roll; additional details in* Numenera Destiny



WINDOW

Squeezing through the conduit: *level 6 for each turn of movement*

BAB5, page 79

Although this opening is nearly as tall as a human, a typical human would have difficulty squeezing through it. The aperture connects to a conduit that ends in the room where Gullk is (area 13), but the length and angle of the conduit limits what can be seen there: a large room with flashing light off to the left side, and two translucent spheres, one empty and the other containing a shiny black automaton (BAB5, see below). If the PCs wait long enough, they might hear Gullk speak to BAB5 or Hwaa, or even see Gullk come into view.

Crystalline automatons, page 78

It is possible to make attacks from this side of the conduit, but its width and angle hinders attacks into and out of Gullk's room by two steps. If attacked, Gullk sends his embedded crystalline automatons to fly into this room and attack while he moves out of view and gets ready for any surviving PCs to attack him directly in his lair. A character moving through the conduit can only travel an immediate distance as their entire turn (taking two turns to reach the far end of the conduit). Someone at the far (east) end of the conduit can make attacks into area 13 without penalty and still gains some cover against attacks from the room (Speed defenses against these attacks are eased). If a fight takes place within the conduit (such as Gullk's automatons entering it to confront a PC), any human-sized creature within it has their Speed defense tasks hindered.

CRYSTALLINE PILLAR

Crystalline pillar: *level 6*

This small numenera fixture is about waist high, somewhat smooth, and sometimes flashes with pale interior lights. A successful understanding numenera task allows the user to manipulate the pillar to create various musical tones, each accompanied by a gentle pulse of light, with it repeating similar patterns as if trying to teach the user a simple code or language, but there's nothing the character can actually learn from it. Salvaging it doesn't harm or affect anything in this ruin.

BAB5

If a PC spends at least a couple of rounds in front of the window staring into area 13, BAB5 notices them. Although the translucent prison sphere prevents it from using most of its abilities, it can still (faintly) telepathically reach out to the PC while they're within line of sight. BAB5 can provide the following information:

- Its name is BAB5, and it is a sentient telepathic automaton.
- It was exploring here with its friend Hwaa and a nano named Gullk.
- When he saw the wealth of numenera here, Gullk betrayed BAB5 and Hwaa and confined them here so he could slowly drain their energy.
- When the PCs and Gullk fought within the pyramid, BAB5 and Hwaa were able to sense their presence, and remotely activated numenera to create new bodies for the dead PCs and transfer their consciousness into those bodies.
- The body-baking process seems to cause short-term memory loss.
- Any physical errors in the baked body can be corrected if BAB5 and Hwaa are freed and directly able to access the device.
- BAB5 and Hwaa just want to escape; they don't care if the PCs kill, distract, trick, or bargain with Gullk to accomplish this.
- If the PCs can free BAB5 and Hwaa from their imprisoning spheres, they'll help fight Gullk if that's what the PCs want.

10. TUBE SCREAMER NEST

The floor here is covered in a layer of rubble, seemingly broken off of the many smashed crystalline nodules embedded in the walls and ceiling. The recently killed corpses of two green feline creatures are thrown into one corner, with several mostly eaten prey animals scattered around. Several places near the ceiling have small hand-sized holes.

This is the nest of the tube screamers living within the pyramid. Gullk, BAB5, and Hwaa entered this area, were attacked by all six of the screamers, and killed two of them, causing the other four to flee and avoid this area for a while. That means this area is a safe place for the PCs to camp, so long as they don't mind being near fresh and not-so-fresh animal corpses. Gullk has already salvaged the remains of the screamers.

11. SPIKE SLAUGHTER ROOM

This oval room has several large crystal spikes jutting from the walls. Several corpses are scattered around the area, including one that's partially melted onto the floor and one that's impaled on a crystal spike. To the PCs, the corpses are nauseatingly familiar.

Every few minutes, the tips of the crystal wall spikes make an audible crackle like they're discharging electricity, but there is no visible effect: they don't seem to do anything, they aren't connected to anything, and they don't even contain salvageable numenera.

This is where the PCs first encountered Gullk, he attacked them, and they lost. Obviously, the corpses are the original bodies of the PCs. Gullk has looted them of their artifacts and whatever cyphers survived the fight, but their other equipment is still present (although some of it might be damaged).

If the PCs haven't already had a flashback group GM intrusion about the battle with Gullk, they should have it now.

THE GULLK FLASHBACK

The GM should fill in details about the past battle using their understanding of the PCs' abilities and tactics. For example, if the Glaive PC usually leads off with an attack using a broadsword, and the Nano PC starts with an Onslaught, that happens in the flashback.

Notable features of the flashback should include some or all of the following:

- Gullk's odd appearance (a man with a muscular upper body, thin legs, and a crystal where his head should be) and his red synth haversack
- Gullk using force blasts and telekinesis against the PCs (including using telekinesis to tear a PC in half and disarm a PC of an important weapon or artifact)
- Gullk killing a PC by impaling them on one of the crystal wall spikes
- Gullk using a detonation cypher that melts the flesh of one of the PCs
- Multiple characters experiencing severe failures in their own abilities and their resistances to Gullk's attacks

The GM should convey that it was a difficult fight for the PCs, and that bad luck (in the form of GM intrusions from players rolling 1s on attacks and defenses) played a part in their loss. The point of this flashback intrusion is to frighten and anger the PCs so they want to pursue Gullk, and to inform the players of some of his capabilities so the PCs can plan for them. Armed with this knowledge, the characters should be able to defeat the foe who recently bested them.

Flashback GM intrusion (group): *The characters experience memories of losing their battle with Gullk.*

Floating eyeball: *level 6; short-range ray inflicts 5 Speed damage (ignores Armor) and 5 Intellect damage (ignores Armor) on a failed Speed defense roll; flies a short distance each round*

Hovering haversack: *level 6 to move*

Crystal automatons, page 78

GM intrusion: *The eyeball's ray attack also embeds a smaller version of itself in the character's flesh. The eyeball can look around on its own but the character can't see through it; harming it hurts just like actions against the character's natural eyes.*

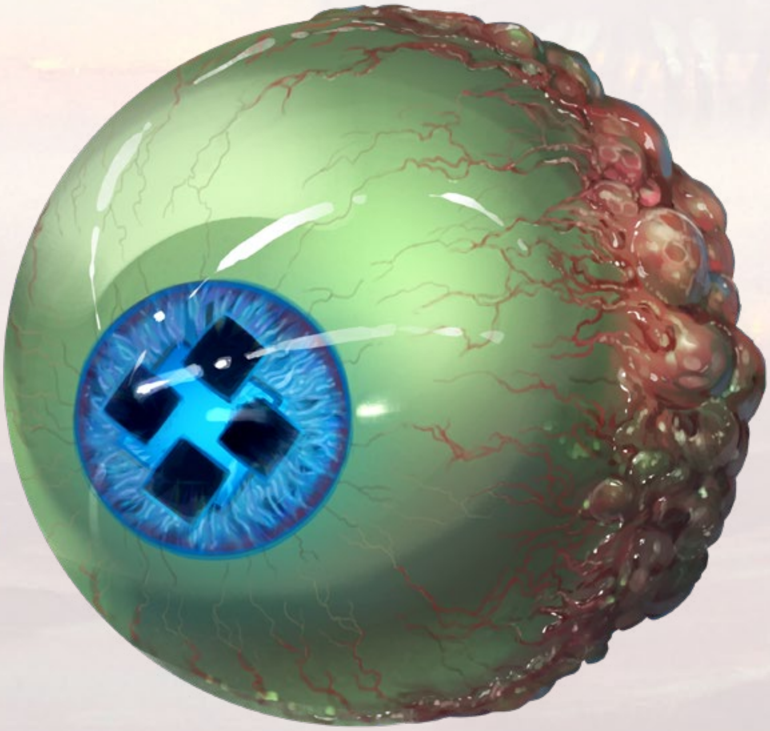
12. THE STARING EYE

This irregularly shaped room has a red synth haversack hovering in midair, a large floating eyeball staring at the haversack, and a window-like aperture on one wall. The floor has several large puddles of water, as if it had recently been washed.

This room is mostly safe.

HAVERSACK

This belongs to Gullk. It hovers in midair because of a long-duration telekinetic esotery he used on it to keep it out of the water, and will remain in place for several more hours after the PCs first arrive. If it is opened or moved, Gullk senses the disturbance and sends one of his crystal automatons to check on it and report back to him (if the PCs attack the automaton, it immediately flees so it can report the intruders to Gullk). The haversack contains his traveling gear, food, and miscellaneous supplies.



EYEBALL

The floating eyeball is as large as a human torso, pale green instead of white, with a bright blue iris and multiple square pupils. It remains focused on the haversack unless something else enters its field of view, causing it to track that thing's movement. (Gullk didn't like how it watched him, and levitated his haversack to draw its attention away from him; he plans to figure it out later.)

As long as it doesn't take damage, the eye doesn't take actions other than to follow movement, even if the PCs examine it, touch it, or cover it up with a cloth or other visual barrier. If harmed, the eyeball retaliates with one ray attack and then fades away at the end of its turn. The vanished eye is actually lurking in a nearby dimension and observing the PCs. It may return every few minutes to attack once before disappearing again; PCs who beat its initiative can get one attack in before it's gone again. If killed, it disappears forever.

PUDDLES

The puddles are normal water, each about 3 feet (1 m) across. The water won't evaporate from this room on its own, but it can be mopped up, drunk, or boiled away (such as by a large fire attack) as normal. If left alone, the puddles slowly move about the room, somewhat like how large slime creatures might do, sometimes combining with each other or splitting up into smaller units.

WINDOW

This window and its conduit is essentially the same setup as the one in area 9, except it's on the opposite side of Gullk's lair and Hwaa is visible instead of BAB5.

HWAA

If a PC spends at least a couple of rounds in front of the window staring into area 13, Hwaa notices them. Although the translucent prison sphere prevents him from using most of his abilities, he can still remotely influence machines in minor ways, and while the PC remains in sight he uses this ability to activate or vibrate a piece of numenera they have (such as a cypher or permanently implanted device), using it like a speaker and microphone to send and receive faint audio messages. Hwaa can provide the same information that BAB5 can (as described in area 9), except he identifies himself as Hwaa, a nano octopus.

13. GULLK'S LAIR

This long high-ceilinged room is filled with a constant buzz of energy. In the corners are four translucent crystalline spheres, with two of them containing some sort of creature. On the far end is an elevated platform, cluttered with numenera, in front of an array of crystalline structures embedded in the wall. Floating above the platform is a human man with a large, strong upper body, thin legs, a purple crystal where his head should be, and four head-sized crystals sticking out of his back. Bolts of electricity occasionally arc from the wall crystals to the man's crystal numenera, but he doesn't react as if this causes him any discomfort. Halfway up the left and right wall are narrow openings that a human might be able to squeeze through.

There's a lot going on in this room, and the GM should read this information carefully. The key elements are the electrified man (Gullk), the platform with the large crystalline numenera, the translucent spheres (currently holding Hwaa and BAB5 prisoner), and the hard-to-notice ventilation holes above the main entrance where the PCs come in.

THE ELECTRIFIED MAN

The muscular man with the purple crystal head is, of course, Gullk, recognizable from the PCs' flashback. The crystals embedded in his back weren't there when the PCs last encountered him—they're new automaton minions he's activated since his last encounter with the PCs. The bolts of electricity striking him are a side effect of his ongoing study of this numenera, and are harmless to him.

Gullk can use his telekinesis to hover or fly (as an old habit when he was first learning this ability, he moves himself by making a fist and shifting his arm as if he's grasping his body in a telekinetic hand, but he doesn't actually need to do this to use the ability). This is his main method of movement while working in this area.

Because he's usually facing away from the doorway, and because it's noisy here (stealth tasks are eased), it'll probably take a round or two before he notices the PCs come into view. When he notices the PCs, he becomes angry ("Didn't I already kill you?") and attacks (whether or not they've attacked him here).

In combat, Gullk quickly releases his embedded automaton minions so they can provide assets to his defense or strike out directly at the PCs. He tries to remain on his side of the room, using distance and the lack of stairs to hamper anyone wanting to use melee attacks against him.

Squeezing through the conduit: *level 6 for each turn of movement*

Hwaa, page 79

Gullk, page 78

If Hwaa communicates at a distance by vibrating a character's implanted numenera, that's probably a startling and weird sensation for the character, but otherwise harmless—it's not really any different than how a wireless mobile phone earbud works.

BAB5, page 74

Gullk is ambitious and greedy, but he's not willing to die for what he's found here. If he's greatly hurt and it seems that the PCs will defeat him, he asks them to spare his life in exchange for him telling them what he knows about this place, giving them back their stolen artifacts, and reconfiguring his embedded crystal automatons as additional artifacts they can use. If the PCs don't accept his surrender, he shrugs, resumes fighting, and focuses his efforts on killing at least one PC (probably the one he thinks is the weakest) before they take him down.

Gullk: *level 6, attacks and Intellect defense as level 7; health 24; Armor 2 (from esotery); short-range force blast and short-range telekinetic attack each inflict 6 damage per round; as part of another action he can release the four crystals from his back to attack as separate creatures (level 4); flies a short distance each round*

Crystal Automatons: *level 4; Armor 2; ramming attack inflicts 4 damage, can use its action to grant an asset to Gullk's Speed defense; flies a short distance each round*

Group GM intrusion: *Several arcs of energy simultaneously strike Gullk on his head and back, causing him to glow from the inside. For the rest of the encounter, all of his tasks are eased, he gains 5 health (even if this puts him over his maximum), and the damage from his attacks increases by 1.*

LOOT

In addition to the PCs' stolen artifacts, Gullk has 55 shins.

If he is able to negotiate, he might offer the PCs his crystal automatons (if any haven't been destroyed) in exchange for sparing his life. Although he can't configure them to work for anyone else like they do him (his crystal numenera is uniquely suited for the arrangement he has with them), with a few hours of work he can reconfigure one to function as a level 4 murder globe or vuechi (whichever a PC requests).

Murder globe, page 299

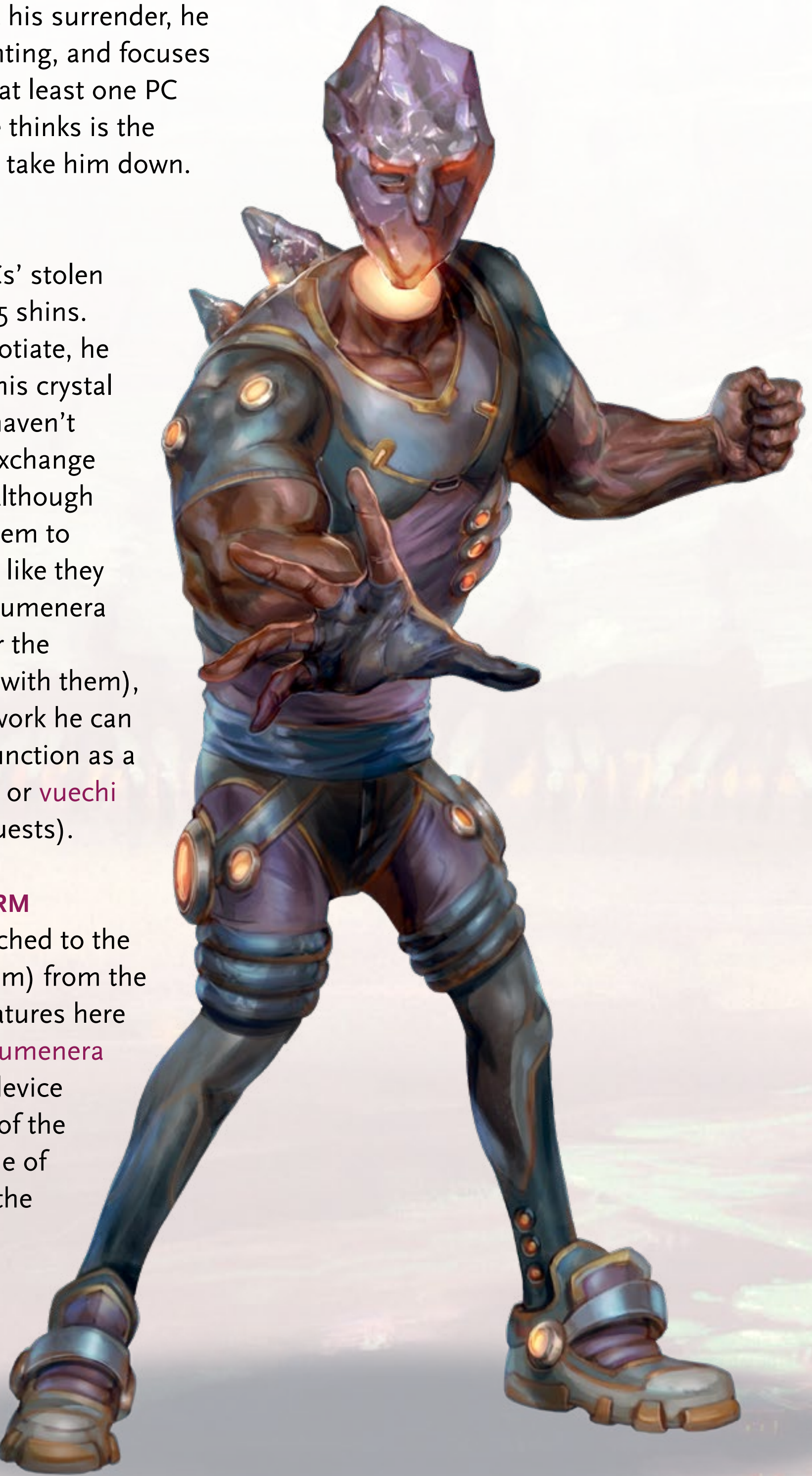
Vuechi, page 303

CLUTTERED PLATFORM

This platform is attached to the wall about 10 feet (3 m) from the floor. The two key features here are the crystal wall numenera (which is one large device extending the width of the platform) and the pile of artifacts taken from the PCs. (This pile may contain some of the cyphers the original PCs carried with them, but the GM should remember that some of them were used in their battle against Gullk and others were left on their bodies for the freshly baked PCs to loot.)

Crystal wall numenera: *level 7, resists damage as level 8; immediate-range electrical arc attacks one PC per round; retaliates once each round against any creature who attacks it*

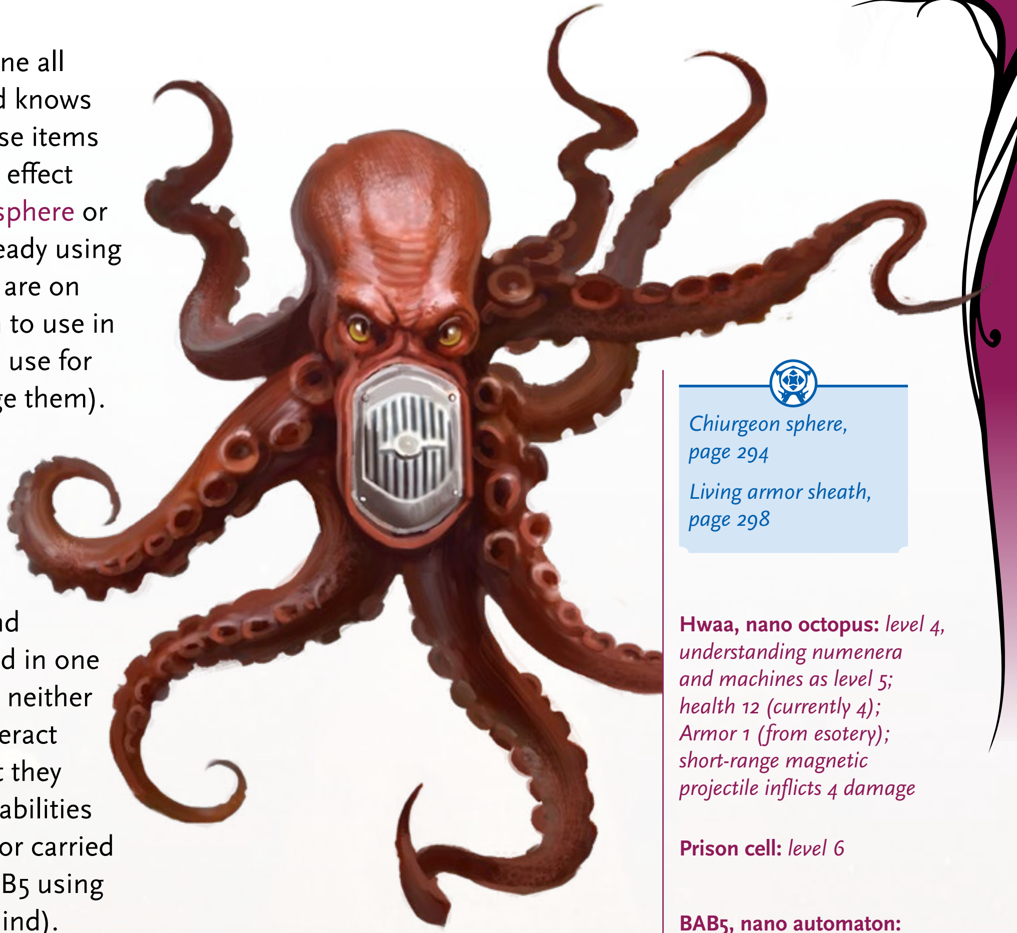
Anyone other than Gullk on the platform is at risk of being attacked by the seemingly random bolts of electricity the wall creates.

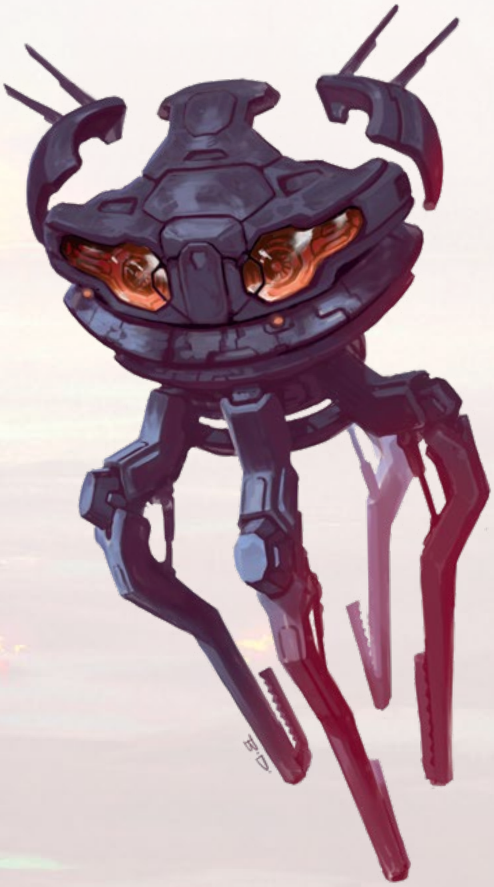


Gullk has had time to examine all of the PCs' stolen artifacts and knows how to use them. If any of these items would have an ongoing useful effect for him (such as a chiurgeon sphere or living armor sheath), he is already using them. Otherwise, the artifacts are on the platform, available for him to use in combat (eventually he'll find a use for them, even if it's just to salvage them).

PRISONERS

The octopus Hwaa is trapped in one of the left-side prison cells (half-filled with water for his comfort), and the automaton BAB5 is trapped in one on the right. While stuck here, neither of them can aid the PCs or interact with anything in the room, but they can use their communication abilities (Hwaa using numenera worn or carried as a speaker for his words, BAB5 using its telepathy to talk mind-to-mind). If freed, they immediately help the PCs against Gullk, either by providing assets to their attacks or defenses, or by engaging Gullk's crystalline automatons. If only one of them is freed and the PCs tell them to free the other, they attempt to do so (after crossing the room), but this will take at least several rounds because their NPC levels are significantly less than the cell's object level.





Chiurgeon sphere, page 294

Living armor sheath, page 298

Hwaa, nano octopus: *level 4, understanding numenera and machines as level 5; health 12 (currently 4); Armor 1 (from esotery); short-range magnetic projectile inflicts 4 damage*

Prison cell: *level 6*

BAB5, nano automaton: *level 4, understanding numenera as level 5; health 12 (currently 6); Armor 2; short-range psychic blast inflicts 4 Intellect damage; flies a short distance each round*

GM intrusion: *Gullk's telekinetic attack also disarms the character or steals an important item; the character can resist with a successful Might defense roll.*

GM intrusion: *As part of his attack, Gullk telekinetically manipulates and activates the character's stolen artifact, attacking the character with it if it is a weapon or gaining its benefits if not.*

HOLES

Above the entrance to this room (where the PCs can't see them) are several of the holes used by the tube screamers to navigate the pyramid. If the PCs haven't already dealt with all four tube screamers, they may emerge here during the conflict with Gullk as a GM intrusion. They aren't averse to attacking Gullk as well as the PCs, but as long as he remains in the air or on the platform, they can't reach him, so they'll focus on the PCs.

Tube screamer: *level 5, Speed defense as level 6 due to quickness and instantaneous squeezing; Armor 2 (5 against fire); bite inflicts 5 damage; once every couple of rounds can ignite air through its ovoid turbines and expel a cone of fire in an adjacent immediate area that inflicts 9 damage on a failed Speed defense roll or 2 on a successful one*

GM intrusion: *One or two tube screamers emerge from holes above the entrance to this area and attack the character.*

IF THE PCs LOSE THIS FIGHT

Despite their preparation and tactics, the PCs might still lose this fight against Gullk. Fortunately, as long as BAB5 or Hwaa is alive, the PCs will be rebaked yet again, which takes about an hour. This gives the PCs the opportunity to confront Gullk again (while he is still wounded from the battle) and hopefully defeat him, or they could abandon this place (which would mean BAB5 and Hwaa eventually die from Gullk draining their energies to power his experiments).

If the PCs lose the fight in this area a second time, Gullk searches the entire pyramid to figure out how the PCs keep coming back from the dead, and once he finds the Flesh Oven, he interrupts the process and disables the numenera there to prevent it from being used against him anymore. This means the PCs are truly dead—or perhaps their consciousnesses get transferred into the datasphere, and the campaign spends some time in the digital virtual realm while the PCs try to find how to get back to the physical world.

For more information about the datasphere, see Numenera supplement Voices of the Datasphere from Monte Cook Games.

AFTERMATH

Once Hwaa and BAB5 are free, they are happy to accompany the PCs to the Flesh Oven to correct any baked-in errors in the PCs' bodies (assuming that Gullk hasn't salvaged the numenera there to keep the PCs from coming back). They both are reasonably skilled nanos and will help the PCs salvage whatever they want from the pyramid (they provide two assets on all attempts to understand or salvage numenera). Afterwards, they thank the PCs, encourage them to be safe in their travels, and head to Qi to retire from exploring.

Qi, page 144

If the PCs allow Gullk to live, he sets off on his own, heading in a different direction from where the PCs want to go (and likewise not in the direction of Qi, not wanting to be around the companions he betrayed). He may turn up later in the campaign, perhaps as a villain (angry that the PCs defeated him) or a potential ally (grateful that they spared his life).

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

With the prisoners freed and Gullk no longer an immediate threat, the PCs are free to explore the rest of the pyramid and proceed to their next discovery.

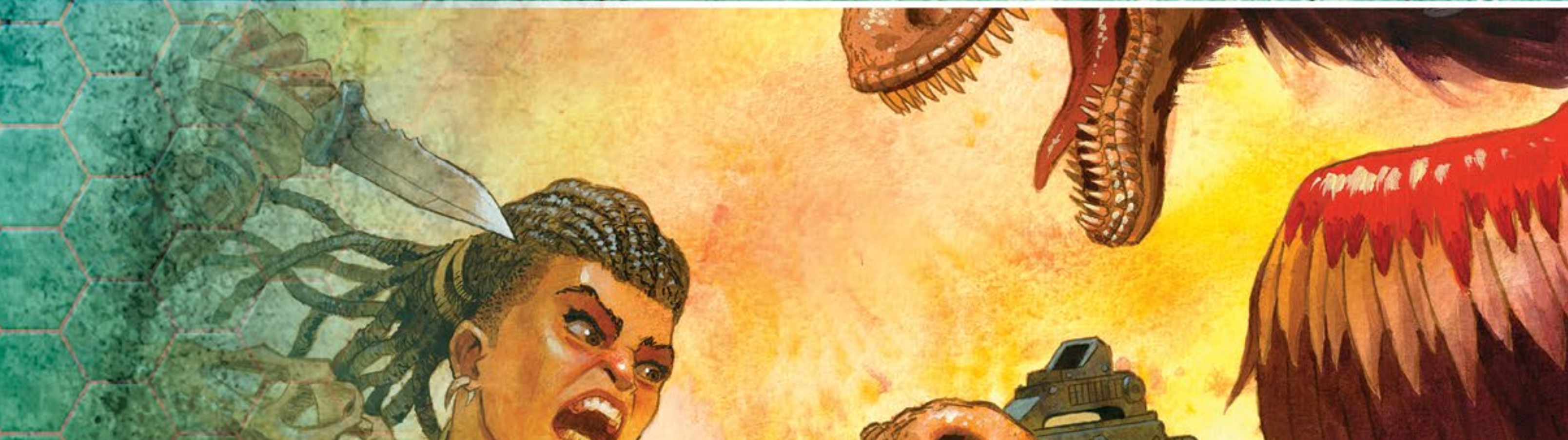
XP FOR CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Award each PC 1 XP for freeing BAB5 and/or Hwaa, 1 XP for dealing with Gullk, and 1 XP for exploring the pyramid (even if they don't visit all of the rooms or don't remember doing so).

CHAPTER 5

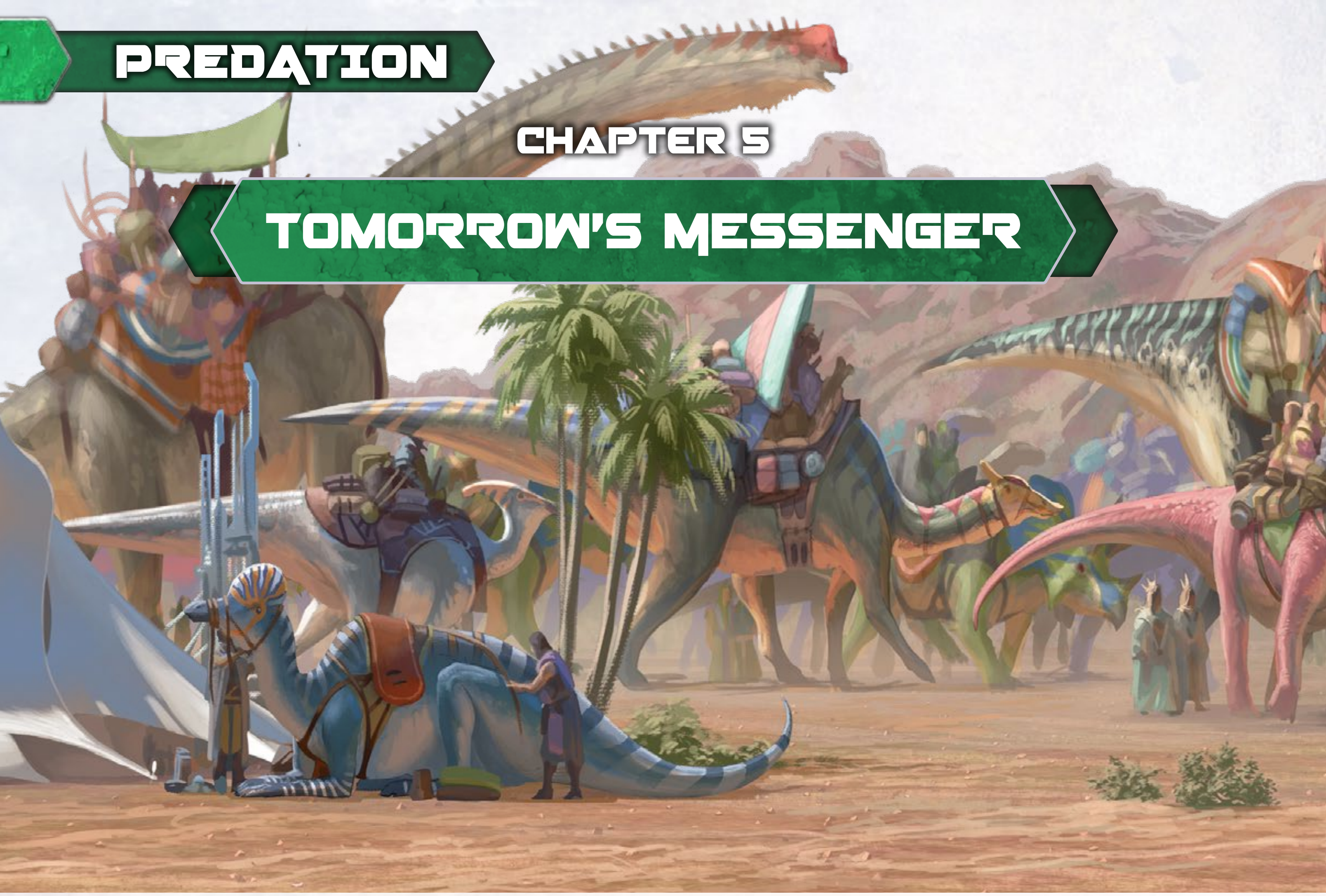
TOMORROW'S MESSENGER

BY SHANNA GERMAIN



AN ADVENTURE SET IN

PREDATION



CHAPTER 5

TOMORROW'S MESSENGER

HOW TO USE THIS ADVENTURE

Throughout this adventure, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by these two symbols.

The first are page references to the *Cypher System Rulebook*, where you can find additional details about that rule, ability, creature, or concept.

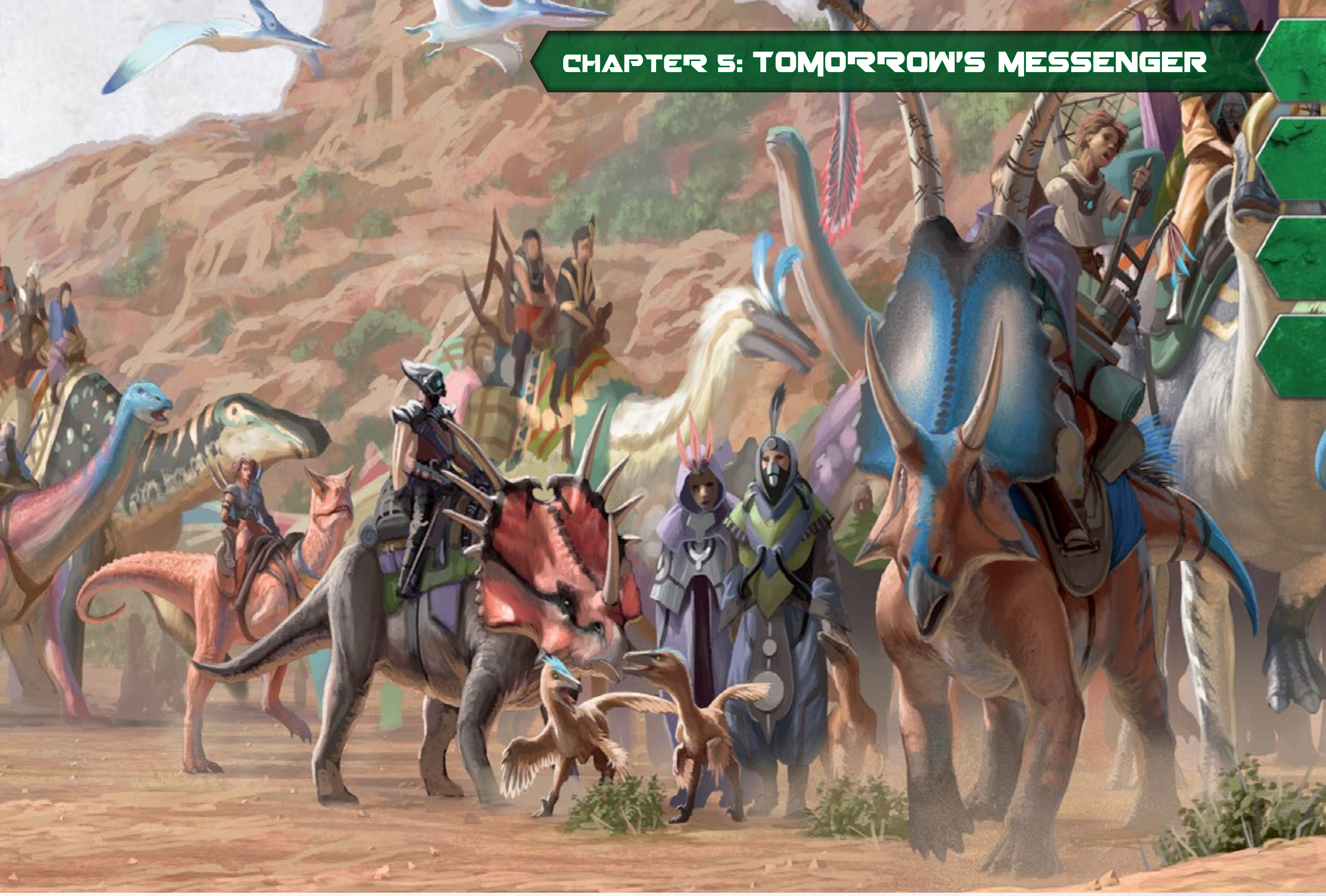
The second are page references to *Predation*, where you can find similar material.

However, "Tomorrow's Messenger" contains all the necessary information—as long as you have the *Cypher System Rulebook*, you can still run the adventure.

"Tomorrow's Messenger" is designed to be played as a stand-alone adventure. With some slight adjustments, it could also be used to kick off a longer campaign, or added to an existing campaign.

Characters should be built using the *Cypher System Rulebook*, and ideally, with *Predation*. If you don't have the latter, ask your players to create characters appropriate to a science-fiction setting.

The adventure is designed for low- to mid-tier characters but could easily be adjusted for higher-tier characters by introducing additional interactions, hurdles, and GM intrusions. Any beast, being, place, or object that would be appropriate to a *Predation* game could be added as an ally, quest giver, threat, or item of interest.



BACKGROUND

The setting for this adventure is the late Cretaceous period on Earth, but one that contains a colony of abandoned time travelers from the future (somewhere after the early 2100s).

PCs are children (or grandchildren) of the original travelers (often called "commuters"). They call the world they live in Grevakc. Grevakc is a land of danger and dinosaurs, of myth and science, of hope and despair.

The organization responsible for abandoning the time travelers is Space and Time, Interglobal (usually just called SATI). The people of Grevakc generally regard SATI with a mixture of betrayal and hope. Though cut off from the far-future version of the organization, a splinter of SATI continues to operate in Grevakc.

Besides people who don't belong in the past, SATI's operations left behind temporal flaws, believed to be the result of time travel (or perhaps of time travel's breakdown), but no one knows for sure. These time anomalies typically look like glitches in the landscape, places where the edges don't line up. Occasionally, they seem like a mirage, the flickering image of a place or structure that doesn't belong.

Once in a while, a time anomaly makes a sound as it appears, a low whining hum that is easier for animals to hear than humans.

Typically, time anomalies last anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. Rarely, they last days or even years.

Time anomalies almost always carry technologies, objects, and information from the future in the form of cyphers, artifacts, and weird stuff that has no apparent use, but presumably represents flotsam of the future. They can also bring danger, usually in the form of electrical charges, odd lightning sparks, or sudden fires.

Time anomalies, page 74

Grevakc, page 66

SATI, page 116

You can download pregenerated first-tier characters for this adventure at: https://mymcg.info/aitcs-pregens

SATI

Subtle Cyphers, page 378

Laramidia, page 76

Aello, page 94

Companions, page 46

In the *Predation* setting, cyphers are a variety of subtle cypher. They are vestigial remnants of far-future technologies, sciences, and information storage systems that manifest via time anomalies as bits of digital information that self-encode into human DNA. Unlike standard subtle cyphers, the cyphers PCs can gain by walking into a time anomaly can run the gamut of fantastic effects.

Another aspect of the *Predation* setting is that most PCs can have a dinosaur companion.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The player characters are all employed by an organization called Archeological Institute of Future Lives (AIFL). For the last month, they've been doing excavation work at the site of an early and long-defunct SATI outpost, located at the base of the mountains on a long thin island continent called Laramidia, just southwest of a somewhat ramshackle city called Aello.

So far, it's been a lot like every other dig site that AIFL has worked on—interesting things to be uncovered, some of them from the future, some of them from the past—but overall no one really expects anyone to find anything of note. In fact, the most exciting thing the PCs have uncovered is a well-preserved picture book called *It's Time For Your First Space Ride!* complete with an equally well-preserved photo of two kids playing being used as a bookmark.

That all changes toward the end of the excavation. As the adventure begins, the PCs have just uncovered something they can't identify—a blue metallic cylinder which clearly has something inside.

When they open it, they discover what looks like a simple metal figurine of a triceratops, but it's clear from the figure's construction and the way that it seems to boot up as soon as it's handled that it's something more. It's actually a device that was used in the far future to communicate with commuters in Grevakc. These devices have been rumored to exist, but none have been found that are still working.

NO COMPANIONS?

If you'd like to run this adventure with characters who have no dinosaur companions (maybe because you don't have easy access to *Predation*), that's fine. However, consider decreasing the number of foes PCs will face in any given combat encounter by one.

When the triceratops is handled by one of the characters, it boots up and attempts to implant a tiny electronic nanite into their DNA. Soon, they begin to hear a teenager speaking to them as if in their head, asking for help. He was on his way from the future to meet his family here when he got trapped in a time anomaly.

As soon as AIFL hears about the device, they tell the group to stay put and promise to send someone out to pick it up as soon as possible. However, they're not the only ones listening in on the AIFL communication lines. SATI, for example, keeps secret tabs on many AIFL expeditions, and they recognize the device instantly as something that could be used to communicate with people in the future.

Soon members of SATI show up where the PCs are, allegedly to control the scene and keep everyone safe, but mostly to make sure they gain control of the device before too many people know what it really does. And they're definitely not the only ones who want it. As the PCs travel to the location of the child, any number of adversaries step in to try and stop them, steal the device, or worse. Additionally, the boy's sister shows up, not believing that her older brother could possibly be alive, but willing to do just about anything to help the PCs find out.

By following the clues, the PCs can discover that the boy is trapped in a time anomaly—and has been for nearly eighty years.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

When the adventure begins, the PCs have just ended a day of digging at the AIFL site and are sitting down to a shared dinner.

They've been working together for most of the summer, so they should know each other pretty well by this point. Have the players introduce and describe their characters to each other and talk about some experiences they've had together (such as finding the picture book detailed below).

Because it's a small site and one that isn't expected to reveal anything of interest, it's just the PCs and their AIFL supervisor, Jael Hyeon.

The vast majority of the site has already been cleared, and the team has found what might be deemed "expected" items, including various living supplies like dishes and food wrappers, pieces of broken lab equipment and technology, dinosaur and human bones, and so on. The only really interesting thing they've found so far is a near-perfect picture book called *It's Time For Your First Space Ride!* Tucked inside was a photo of two kids who look like siblings, one clearly older than the other, playing in a grassy backyard. That find was months ago.

But today, the team made a second find: a blue metallic cylinder that looks a bit like a thermos or a small carrying case. It's about eight inches tall and four inches in diameter. There's clearly something inside it, and it seems like it should open from one end, but they haven't tried to do so yet. The team is planning to try as soon as dinner's finished.

Blue metallic cylinder: *level 3*

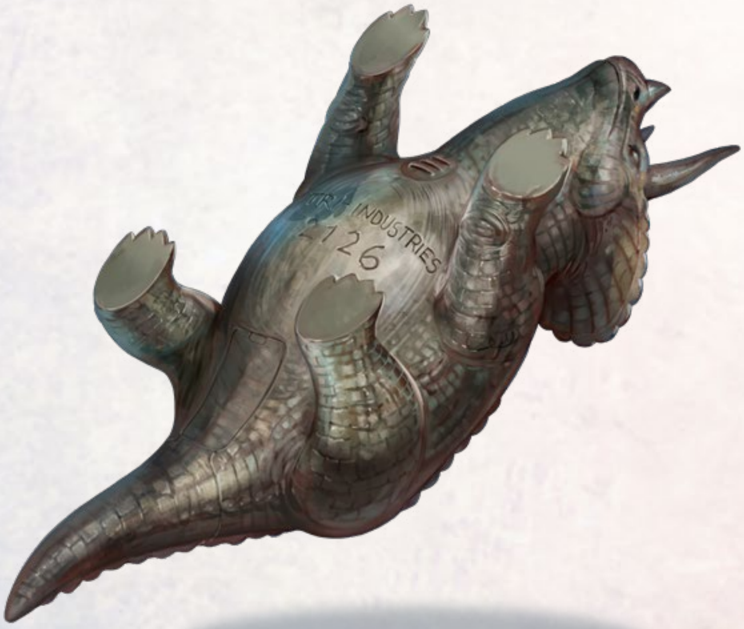
Venators are special SATI-trained law enforcement officers.

Jael Hyeon: *level 4; history, leadership, and positive social interactions as level 5; wields a rock pick*

Communications system: *level 9*

Jael Hyeon. A former venator who discovered a love of history later in life, Jael's a firm believer in hard work and hard play. She leads the team with respect and equality—never asking anyone to do anything that she wouldn't—and pretty much forces everyone to take time off. She wears a jumpsuit with an embroidered image of an ankylosaurus on the back. This was Sirius, her former dinosaur companion, who she loved very much. She has said repeatedly that she just can't bring herself to get another.

Dig Site. The dig site was one of the early SATI outposts, but most of it was demolished about eighty years ago when a giant temporally charged storm (a "time terror") suddenly appeared right over the site. Many of the commuters were killed and most of the equipment and the buildings were destroyed. Now, there is just the dig site that the PCs have been working at, along with a handful of high-tech temporary tents and a permanent community pavilion. The site is stocked with enough food and supplies to last the PCs about three more weeks.



WHAT THE TEAM FOUND

It's up to the PCs to investigate the cylinder; these sorts of tasks are the reason they're here.

The metal cylinder isn't hard to open. With a little finesse or elbow grease, one end pops up with a pneumatic puff of weird- and slightly stale-smelling air.

Inside the tube, wrapped in a soft yellow piece of cloth, is a small metal figurine of a triceratops. The metal figurine is about four inches long and a couple of inches high. It isn't very well rendered, almost as if it was crafted by someone who had never seen an actual triceratops. The triceratops' belly has the words *Tri-Industries* imprinted on it, along with the year 2126.

Although it's clear that it's a device of some kind, it's not instantly obvious what its purpose is.

It is, in fact, a communications system created in the future so that people could communicate across time. This is an early prototype, so it seems likely that this kind of device wasn't common yet, which is why there aren't any working ones (as far as anyone knows) in Grevakc. The devices are designed to create a mental communication channel between two people, no matter their (temporal) distance. The communication system requires two devices and two living humans in order to work. Each device implants a code into one person's DNA, and then the two codes and the two devices allow them to interact as though they're speaking into the other person's mind.

As soon as the device is handled by a living human, it boots up, vibrating gently, as it attempts to deposit its implant into the user's DNA. The first person who touches the triceratops must attempt a level 6 Might defense task. If they fail, the DNA implant works. If they succeed on the defense task, the device attempts to download

ARCHEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF FUTURE LIVES (AIFL)

AIFL is an organization focused on the discovery and study of the future-past, namely items that came from the time travelers' lifespans. It's not affiliated with SATI or any other group or organization, although it does sometimes work alongside them to share information and knowledge toward a better understanding of those who came from the future.

Its headquarters are in Kelaino, the largest city in Grevakc, where the organization eventually hopes to open a museum.

itself into the next person who touches it and so on, until it eventually works. After completing the DNA download, the device stops vibrating and goes quiet again.

GM Tip: To kick off the adventure, it's important that one of the PCs gets the DNA download from the comm device. For this reason, Jael shouldn't handle the comm device first (it's in her nature to let her team enjoy their hard-earned successes, so she would encourage the others to do it anyway).

GM Tip: The device is designed to be as noninvasive as possible, so most people don't even notice if the device is attempting to download into them. You might have the PCs roll as they touch the device in turn without telling them what the results are. Then, when the PC who gets the download starts hearing voices in their head, it comes as a surprise.

Someone linked to the device could attempt to uncouple themselves by extracting the code from their DNA (such as by using something similar to a cypher purge cypher) or by having someone perform a DNA splice on them. If the person with the implant dies, the device will attempt to download the DNA implant into someone new.

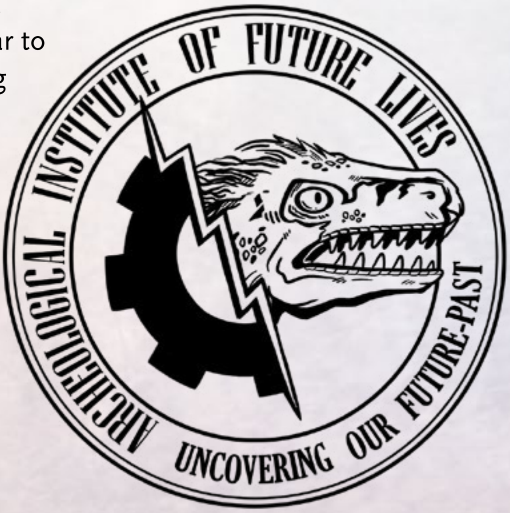
Cypher Purge (cypher): *level 5; purges all remaining cyphers from user's DNA without activating them. This effect is permanent and the purged cyphers cannot be recovered.*

CONTACTING AIFL

Jael will say that they need to contact AIFL right away and let them know what they've found. Thanks to a generous contribution from SATI (the organization subsidizes a fair bit of AIFL's work), AIFL's message device is fairly state-of-the-art in that it's stable, portable, and designed to withstand all of the hardships of being at a dig site. It's a small brown box (about 6" (15 cm) on each side) with a hinged lid that weighs about a pound (0.5 kg). (PCs may later decide to take it with them, but if not, Jael suggests they do.)

AIFL message device: *level 5*

The PCs just need to open the lid on the small brown box at the site and record an audio message, then close the lid. The message is transmitted almost instantly to a similar box at AIFL headquarters, and within just a few minutes, a small bulb on top lights up and the PCs can listen to the return message.


ARCHEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF FUTURE LIVES
UNCOVERING OUR FUTURE-PAST

The message that the PCs get back is similar the message below. You can read it directly, record it ahead of time, or make up something similar that makes sense as a response to the message the PCs have sent. The important things are that it's a rare discovery, that a team from AIFL is heading their way, and the bit at the end where it's clear a struggle is taking place. The Director should sound as if they're trying to hold back from showing just how excited they are by the PCs' discovery.

> *Hello Jael and team. This is Director Gordon Saddler. It sounds like a wonderful and rare find you have there. Excellent work! If I'm not mistaken, Tri-Industries was the pioneer in cross-time communication devices. Which means that what you are holding is perhaps only the second device of its kind ever found. And the first that might actually be functional.*
>
> *Listen, we've already dispatched a team from Aello, led by Benita Heverly—Jael, I believe you know her—to make sure the item is secure. They should be there by late morning to transport the device back to us.*
>
> *Once again, I can't say how . . .*
>
> **<The director's voice fades into the background, as if they've turned away from the device for a moment.>**
>
> *What are you . . . How did you?*
>
> **<Another voice says something that's impossible to make out, and there's a smash and a heavy thud. The director's voice drops to a broken whisper.>**
>
> *Protect it . . . if you . . .*
>
> **<Another thud. The recording stops.>**

If the PCs record another message, they do not get one back until the next morning.

THE VOICE FROM THE FUTURE

It's after the PCs listen to the recording that evening, perhaps as they are attempting to figure out more about what's going on, that the PC with the DNA implant hears a voice in their head. It sounds as if it's being spoken out loud, so the PC may not realize at first that they're the only ones hearing it, or that it's actually coming from inside their head.

The voice sounds like it belongs to a teenage boy, and the person is very clearly confused about what's going on.

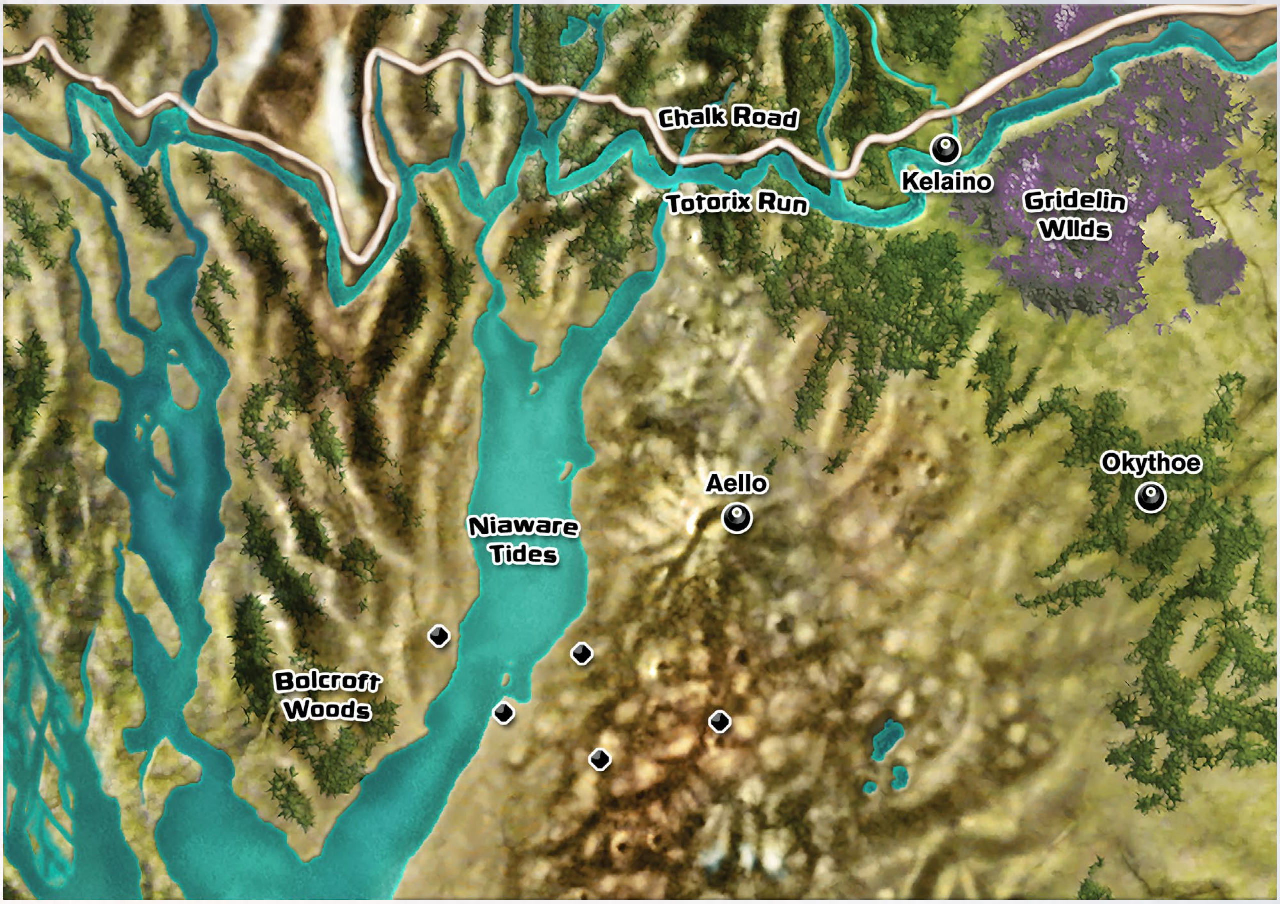
If the PC talks to the voice (they just speak out loud and Carson can hear them in his head), they can learn the following:

Carson, page 99

Fernly, page 94

- The voice belongs to a young person named Carson.
- He's in pain—his leg hurts badly—and he's also very mentally shaken and uncertain about what's going on.
- He says he was on his way from the future to Grevakc to meet his family. He's just arrived, but he's trapped in some kind of weird machine and he can't find a way out.
- He asks about his parents and his little sister, Fernly.
- He says he can see burnt trees and a lot of black-winged creatures flying around him.
- He says he's scared and asks them to come and help him get out.
- If anyone thinks to ask him about the book or the photo, he will say that the book sounds like one his sister has, but he's not sure about the photo.

Some of this likely makes no sense to the PCs, as they know that no one's been able to travel from the future since at least 80 years or so ago (local time, obviously). But the voice seems legit and Carson is telling the truth.



THE MAP

There is a large map of the area in the community pavilion at the dig site. It shows a number of things, including various AIFL dig sites that have been completed, and some that are scheduled to be excavated in the future. The map also shows various natural disasters and marks places where AIFL members have run into different kinds of dinosaurs. By spending some time looking at the map, PCs guess—perhaps with a successful difficulty 2 Intellect-based task—that the likely location of the boy is somewhere on the other side of the water in Bolcroft Woods, which experienced a large wildfire about a year ago.

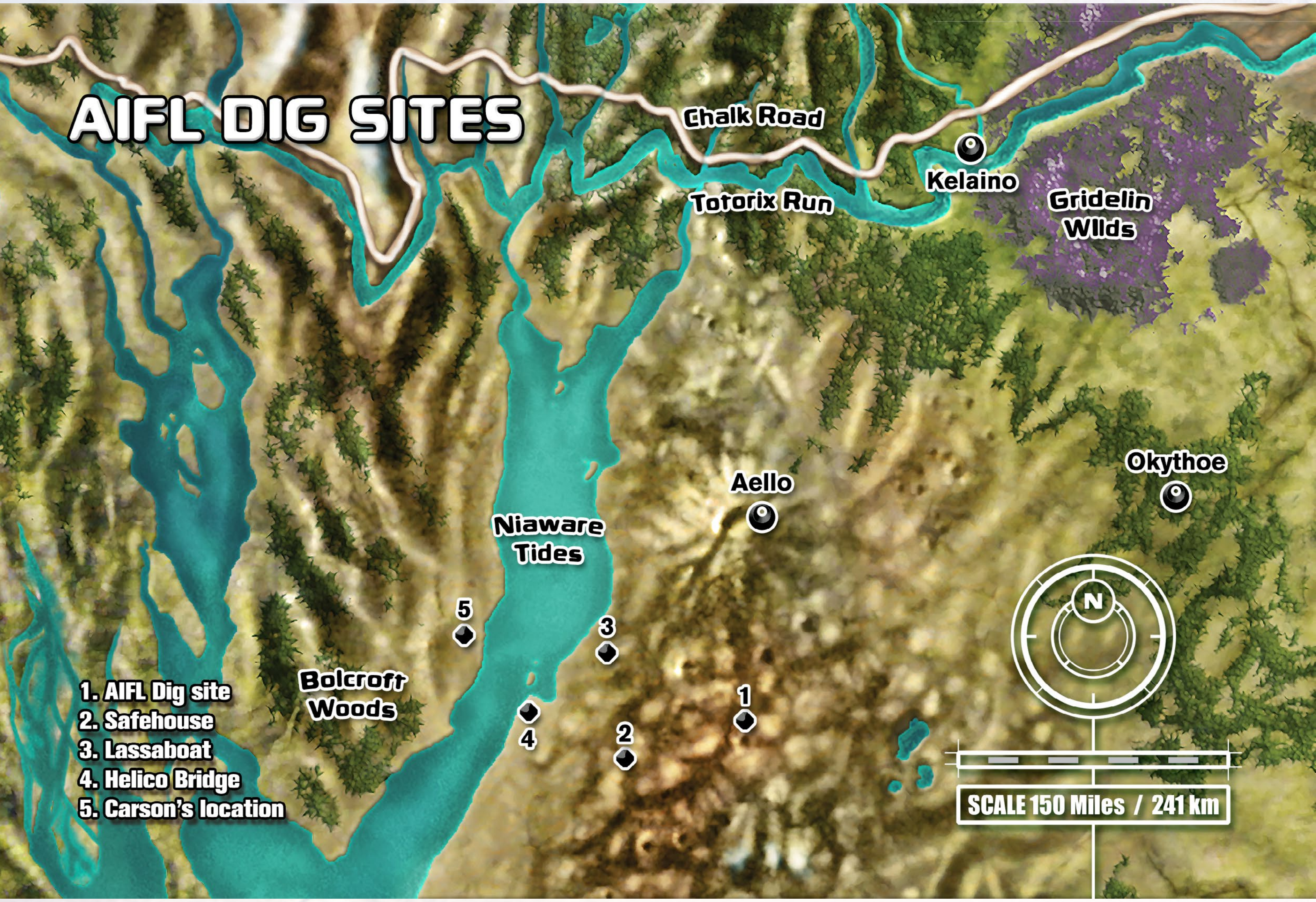
GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

The most likely scenario is that the PCs naturally want to assist Carson (if only to get his voice out of their friend's head) and will set off into the wilds to make their way to him.

If they aren't moved to do so on their own, Jael might ask them to, saying that not only will the device be safer on the move from whoever is trying to claim it, but that if someone (she suspects it's SATI) already came for Director Gordon, they will likely also try to find both the devices and the boy, and who knows what horrible thing will happen to him.

Map: *level 4*

Bolcroft Woods, page 98


AIFL DIG SITES
Chalk Road
Totorix Run
Kelaino
Gridelin Wilds
Aello
Okythoe
Niaware Tides
Bolcroft Woods
5
3
1
4
2
N
1. AIFL Dig site
2. Safehouse
3. Lassaboat
4. Helico Bridge
5. Carson's location
SCALE 150 Miles / 241 km

The main reason SATI is such a generous sponsor of AIFL is so that they can listen in secretly just in case a discovery like the comm device is made. They will, of course, never admit to this.

INTO THE WILDS

Whenever the PCs choose to head out, Jael decides to stay behind to keep watch on the dig site and to misdirect anyone who might come looking for the PCs, the device, or the boy. She advises them to take any supplies they might need or want, including the map, the AIFL message device, and the book with the photo.

The AIFL team does not arrive at the dig site before the PCs leave: as foreshadowed by the message that was received from Saddler, they've been waylaid by someone from SATI (see The False AIFL Team (AKA Angel Hughes)).

The False AIFL Team (AKA Angel Hughes), page 92

EVENTS AND INTERACTIONS

As the PCs make their way toward where they hope they will find Carson, they encounter a number of foes, wild and manmade dangers, and even a potential ally. They're all outlined here, to help you keep track of them. Intersperse them as you describe the PCs traveling toward their destination across the prehistoric landscape.

Apart from the delays these events and interactions may generate, it should only take the PCs a few days at most to reach Bolcroft Woods.

PLOT-RELATED INTERACTIONS

These interactions are tied into the plot, and likely happen in this order:

The False AIFL Team (AKA Angel Hughes) (page 92). This is one of the PCs' first encounters, as Angel is a SATI operative who has waylaid the real AIFL team. The PCs probably won't encounter the real AIFL team at any point.

SATI Spider Crew (page 94). SATI Spider Crew is the three-person team that SATI has sent out to track down the PCs and the device. They are working with Angel, and could show up at the safehouse if the PCs go there during the adventure. They can also track the PCs and intercept them at a different location.

Fernly (page 94). Fernly is Carson's sister and a potential ally. She can catch up with the PCs at any point in the adventure, as long as she's reasonably had time to both help the real AIFL team and travel to where the PCs are.

GROUP INTRUSIONS

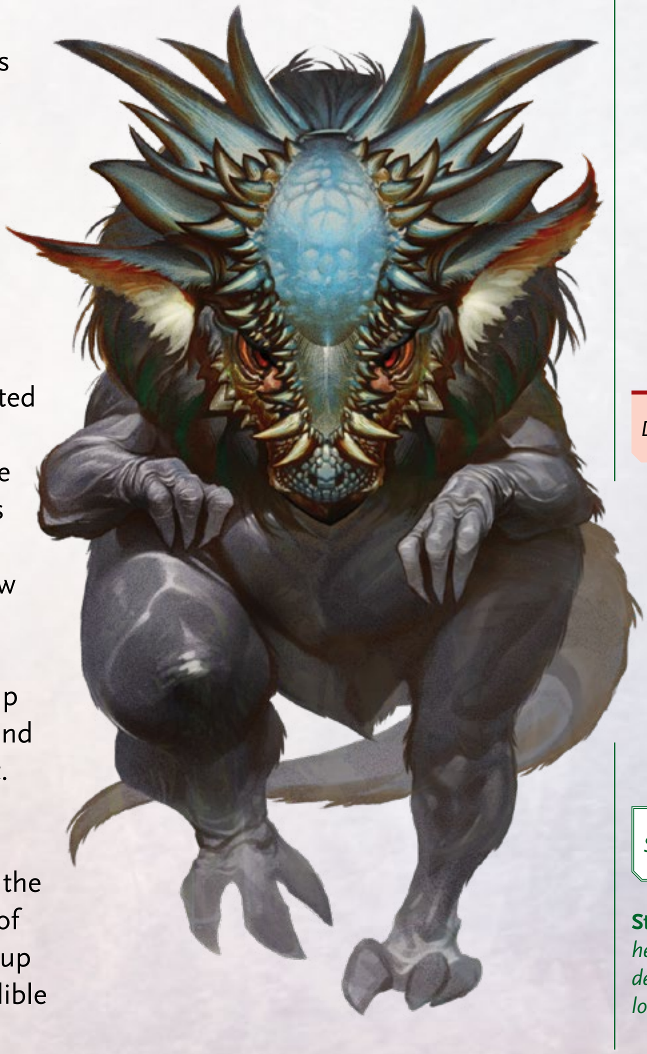
There are also a number of unrelated incidents and random encounters that can happen at any point in the adventure. These group intrusions are all optional and can be cut or expanded upon, depending on how much time you have.

Hungry Deinonychuses. This group of six deinonychuses are hungry, and they've locked onto the PCs' scent.

The Stygimoloch Stampede. Stampedes are not uncommon in the wilds of Grevakc and a stampede of stygimolochs—horned dinosaurs up to 10 feet (3 m) long—is an incredible sight to behold—provided you're looking on from a safe distance. PCs caught in a stampede must succeed on two or three Speed defense rolls to avoid being knocked down and trampled for 5 points of damage each time.

Baby Ankylosaur. The PCs discover a young ankylosaur—a heavily armored quadruped with a club tail and bright eyes—lost and alone, wandering around and crying for help. Its cries are attracting the attention of a nearby group of raptors.

The Thief. The thief—a young man with scars shaped like dinosaur teeth running across his body—slips into the PCs' camp in the dark of night, hoping to gain some food and other valuables for his very own.



Ankylosaur: *level 1; Armor 1*

Thief: *level 4, stealth and pickpocketing as level 6*

The Safehouse, page 93

Deinonychus, page 320

Stygimoloch, page 145

Stygimoloch: *level 4; health 15; Armor 1; horns deal 5 damage; moves a long distance each round*

THE FALSE AIFL TEAM (AKA ANGEL HUGHES)

At some point, the promised AIFL team shows up, either at camp or behind the PCs, having tracked the PCs' trail. However, instead of a whole team, there is only one person: a broad-shouldered woman who's covered in blood. She has what looks like a broken nose and various fresh cuts on her face and arms.

She is accompanied by a 10-foot (3 m) tall brightly colored feathered dinosaur (PCs may recognize it as an anzu) that is obviously worse for wear; it's dazed, off-balance, and seems uncertain about what's going on.

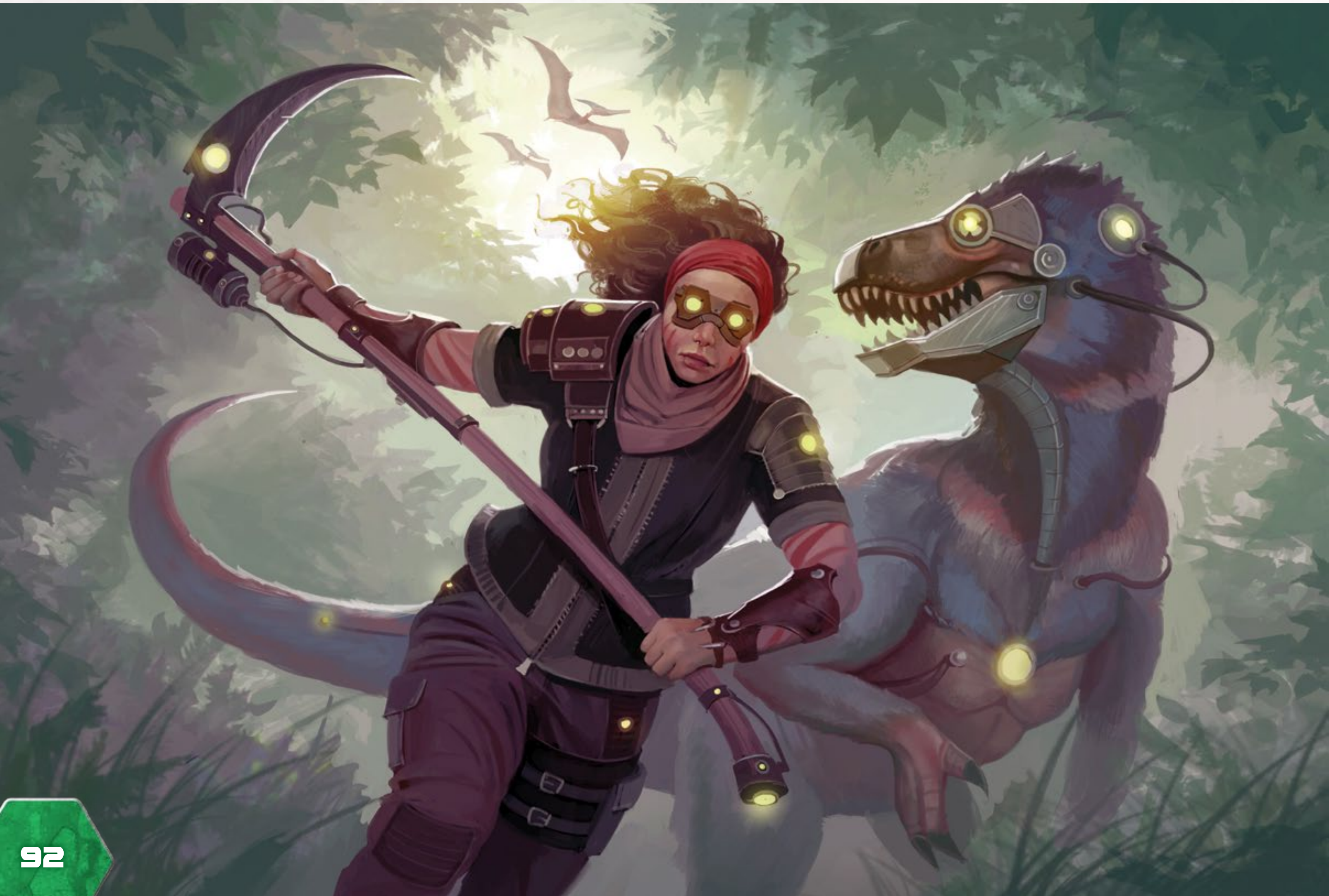
The newcomer introduces herself as Benita Heverly and says that she and her team were ambushed by a large group from SATI on their way to find the PCs. She and her anzu were the only ones who managed to survive and escape, and she says she doesn't think she can protect the PCs by herself, so she recommends they go to a safehouse she knows of nearby where they can take shelter and send another message to AIFL headquarters.

Angel Hughes: *level 4, initiative and unarmed attacks as level 5, impersonation and deception as level 7 (due to cypher, which lasts for a day); Armor 1; carries a laser gun that inflicts 2 damage and stuns a target for one round*

Anzu, drugged: *level 7; all actions hindered by 3 steps due to drugs; if drugs are cleared from system it attacks Angel instead of PCs*

The Real Story: In truth, the newcomer's name is Angel Hughes and she's an off-books SATI operative who drugged and locked up the AIFL team and is impersonating Benita. Her wounds are from the actual Benita, who got the jump on Angel before she could get the drugs in Benita's system.

She's used a cypher to make it difficult for anyone to see through her disguise, including Jael, who met the real Benita once (a long time ago). The anzu was actually Benita's (Jael will recognize it) and Angel has drugged it to make sure it stays docile.



COMMUNICATING WITH AIFL

If the PCs take the AIFL message device with them, they can, over the course of several messages, learn the following:

- Someone attacked the director. He survived but is in critical condition. They suspect that the attacker worked for AIFL and was spying for SATI.
- As far as anyone at AIFL headquarters knows, the AIFL team is on its way to help the PCs.
- Someone at AIFL found old records about a teenage boy named Carson who was supposed to time travel from the future to meet up with his family, who were stationed at the SATI outpost the PCs were digging at. It's believed the rest of his family was killed in the time terror that hit the area about 80 years ago, but no one knows what happened to the boy.
- This discovery is big and SATI will likely stop at nothing to get their hands on both the device and the boy. The PCs should be very careful and watch their backs.

It's Angel's job to get the PCs and the device to the "safehouse" without incident and keep them there until the SATI team arrives. She doesn't want to hurt the PCs, but will do so if she has to. If it comes to that, she will probably remind them of the laser gun she carries—and that she was able to take out the entire AIFL team by herself—in the hopes that they will not force her hand.

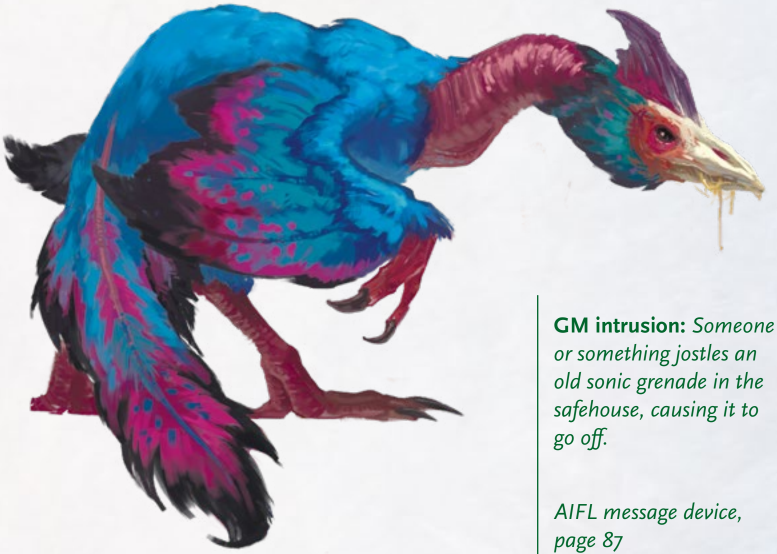
If the PCs find out the truth before they get to the safehouse, Angel will quickly attempt to destroy the AIFL message device.

THE SAFEHOUSE

The safehouse is an old bunker (built originally by SATI), the likes of which are all over the area. While most SATI bunkers are well guarded, some have fallen into disuse and been mostly forgotten about (or are used specifically for purposes such as this one). This one is half-buried, so that only the front is visible.

Benita/Angel has the code number for the electronic lock on the door, but it's also not that hard to jimmy, since there's nothing much in here. The lock is branded with the SATI logo, but nothing else is.

Inside is a small warehouse space that's mostly empty, cold, and nondescript. It doesn't look like anyone's used the place in a long time.



There are some folding tables, chairs, and cots, as well as some empty boxes and a makeshift kitchen with iffy-looking food stores.

There are also two large metal cages that look like they're designed to hold dinosaurs. The cages have doors that shut and lock automatically.

As soon as they're all settled into the safehouse and Benita/Angel feels like she can do it unseen, she attempts to destroy the AIFL message device if it hasn't already been destroyed or left behind.

If the PCs stay in the safehouse longer than about ten hours (such as by taking a ten-hour recovery roll), then the SATI Spider Crew shows up.

If the Spider Crew doesn't intercept the PCs at the safehouse, it will track them down somewhere else on their journey.

GM intrusion: *Someone or something jostles an old sonic grenade in the safehouse, causing it to go off.*

AIFL message device, page 87

Cages: *level 5*

GM intrusion: *The drugged and dazed anzu accidentally locks one or more characters inside a cage.*

Electronic lock on door: *level 4*

SATI Spider Crew, page 94

SATI SPIDER CREW

SATI Spider Crew is the team of three operatives that SATI has sent out to retrieve the device and, ideally, to find the boy as well. None of them have dinosaur companions; in fact, they all wear a dino-repellant chemical that's designed to keep most dinosaurs away from them.

The crew consists of Fatiha who is tall, is clad all in black, wields a crossbow, and talks to everyone as if they are an animal that needs to be soothed; Gülnur who is short and wide, easily angered, and waves around a long metal prod that dances with electricity; and Dillon who sports cropped silver hair, wields an advanced metallic pistol, and talks very little.

The Spider Crew isn't here to kill the PCs, and would like to get the device and find the location of the boy without hurting them at all. However, they aren't willing to leave without the device. They are also likely to try and get the location of the boy or to try and disconnect the PC from the device so that they can connect to it themselves.

The SATI team will promise that if the PCs turn the device and boy over, that SATI will take good care of both of them. They aren't lying, per se, because they believe what they're saying. But they also have little to no control over what SATI might do in the end.

Fernly: *level 5, dinosaur husbandry as level 6; long-range laser pistol inflicts 6 damage; carries a friend shield artifact*

Dino-repellant chemical: *level 4; lasts 24 hours; hinders the actions of all dinosaurs within short range*

GM intrusion: *When the SATI Spider Crew shows up, their chemicals anger whatever dinosaurs are near the PCs.*

Fatiha: *level 4; Armor 1; long-range crossbow deals 6 damage*

Gülnur: *level 4; two electric prod attacks each deal 4 Speed damage (ignores Armor)*

Dillon: *level 5; Armor 1; long-range smart gun (only works for Dillon) deals 6 damage*

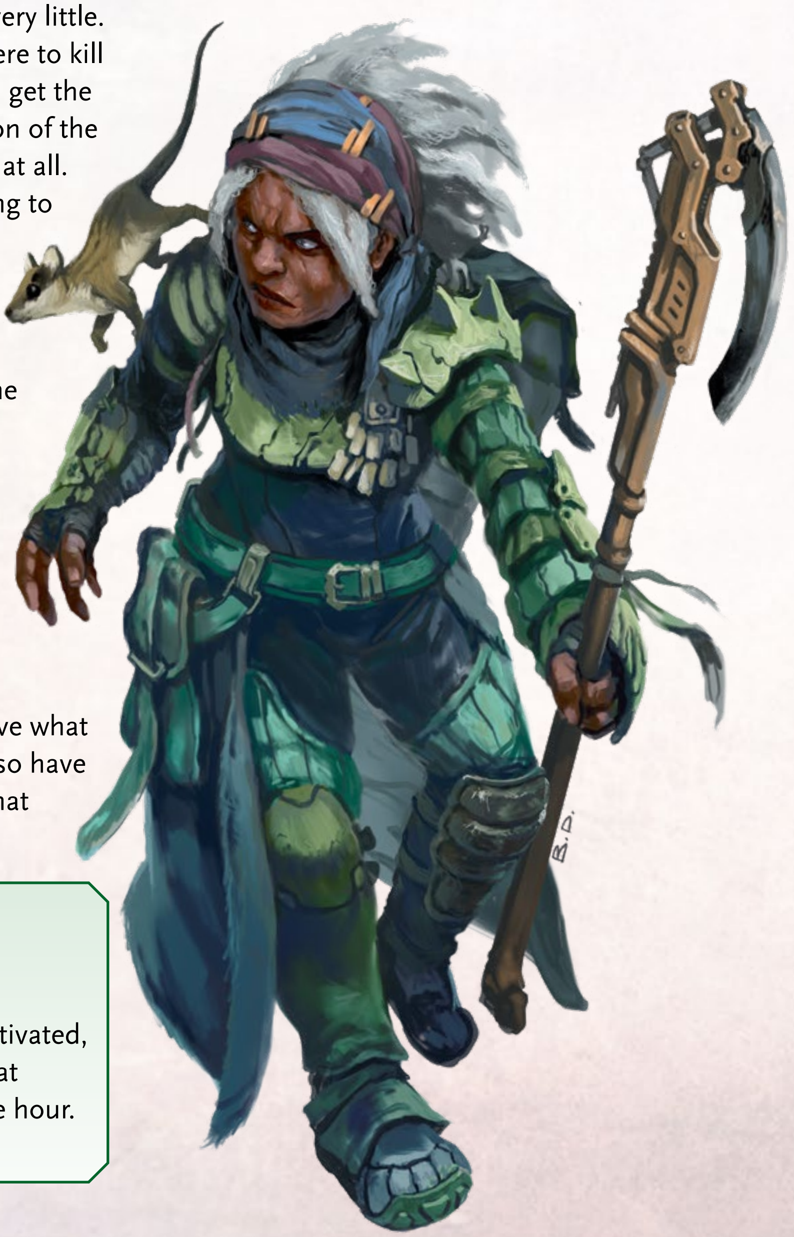
Fernly could eventually track the PCs down after learning about the situation from AIFL or other third parties in the know.

Alphadon: *level 2; initiative, Speed defense, and perception as level 4; stealth and tracking as level 3*

FERNLY: CARSON'S SISTER

Carson's younger sister Fernly—known to some as just Fern—is now in her mid 80s. She's lithe and strong and has a take-no-shit attitude, but it's easy to tell she has a big heart. She used to run a dinosaur rescue just outside of a city called Okythoe, but now she spends her days in the wild, helping out any injured dinosaurs she come across. She has returned to this area recently, drawn by memories of her childhood here.

She's accompanied by a small rat-like mammal (an alphadon), a chaos-monster who tries to steal everything and snuggle up in every available pocket.



FRIEND SHIELD (ARTIFACT)

Level: 1d6

Form: Wristband, glove, or handheld device

Effect: When aimed at a living creature and activated, the device creates an energy field around that creature, providing +1 to their Armor for one hour.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Here's what the PCs can learn from Fernly:

- She was recently helping out a group of people from AIFL and their companions who'd been attacked and locked in dinosaur cages, and they'd told her about the comm device and a boy named Carson who was calling for help.
- She instantly recognized the description of the comm device and believed that it might have belonged to her dad—she saw him use it to talk to her older brother in the future.
- Her brother was supposed to join her and her parents at a SATI outpost not far from here, 80 years ago. The outpost exploded and both her parents were killed. She barely survived, and although she tried for years to find out what happened to her bother, she was never able to.
- If the PCs show her the photo and/or the book, she breaks into tears, saying that they were both hers, and that the photo is of her and Carson.
- She doesn't believe the voice can be Carson's—he was a teenager when he disappeared and he'd be in his late nineties now—but she is determined to find out what's going on. Maybe he has a grandkid named after him who's in trouble. Whatever is happening, she wants to come with the PCs, offering to help keep them safe and take care of the companions along the way.

PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE

The road from the dig site to where Carson is trapped is not an easy or clear one. The PCs find themselves trekking through lots of rocky land and thick jungles until they finally need to cross the wide body of water known as Niaware Tides.

Much of this trek can be handwaved, particularly when nothing interesting is happening. It's fine to just say, "Nothing eventful happened today and you arrive at X place without any trouble." Or "You made good time all morning, but just as you arrive at X, you notice something . . . "

The wilderness and the weather can very much be antagonists in an adventure, and Grevakc is full of opportunities to intrigue or endanger the PCs.

In addition to the Plot-Related Interactions, the Group Intrusions, and the safehouse, this section offers some more places the PCs might discover on their way to find Carson.

Plot-Related Interactions, page 91

Group Intrusions, page 91

The Safehouse, page 93

CAVERN

This unnamed cavern isn't very large as caverns go—about 10 feet (3 m) tall in its tallest places and about 50 foot (15 m) square—but it's absolutely stunning. The interior is filled with incredible cave art, some of it covering entire walls. Many of the pieces feature dinosaurs, but some are also people and landscapes. There's also an image of a very large boat, as well as what looks oddly like a giant jungle gym across the water.

Although the artist isn't here, they left behind notes on the wall about some of what they were drawing.

If the PCs study the illustrations, they notice one of a burnt forest with a note below it that says *Bolcroft Woods, after the fires*. Upon closer inspection, they might notice what looks like a young man trapped in some kind of metallic device. It's not detailed enough to tell what the device is, though.

A box of supplies in the back of the cavern includes dried jerky, a water bottle and three handmade filters, various paints and brushes, and a bottle of dinosaur pheromones (provides an asset on positive dinosaur interactions).

There is also a small cube that, upon inspection, is revealed to be a cypher storage container. It contains two DNA subtle cyphers: a biological plait and a simulation cypher.

Cypher storage container (artifact):: *level 6 artifact; stores 2 DNA subtle cyphers; depletion: 1 in 1d20*

Biological plait (cypher): *level 6; restores 6 Might points*

Simulation (cypher): *level 4; grants an asset lasting ten minutes to user who reviews simulated task for one round, or lasting all day if simulation reviewed for ten minutes*

GM Tip: The cavern can be placed anywhere on the map, and could be the kind of place the PCs come upon just as they're in need of a safe place to rest or a chance to restock their supplies.

GROVE OF THE ALAMOSAURS

This large open area in the middle of the jungle is the home to a band of alamosaurs. These gentle herbivores have extremely long necks and whip-lash tails and generally grow to at least 50 feet (15 m) long. If the alamosaurs notice the PCs, they will gather around them to check them out with huge sniffs of air and slightly wagging tails. Despite being out in the wilds, they almost seem . . . tame? One of them is clearly the leader of the band—and he is the one who seems most eager to communicate with the PCs. If he deems the PCs to be safe, he will lead them to the middle of the grove, where the PCs find a broken-down humanoid robot. The alamosaurs continue to gather around, nudging the PCs.

If a character succeeds on a difficulty 2 Intellect-based task, they get the impression that the alamosaurs want the PCs to do something about the broken robot. Perhaps fix it?

As companions, alamosaurs are sauropods and fall under the category of Ceratopsians & Ankylosaurs.

Alamosaur: *level 10*

Young alamosaur: *level 2*

Companions, page 46
Ceratopsians & Ankylosaurs, page 54

Cyphers, page 377

The Robot. The robot's circuits are fried, and it's a level 7 task to repair it. If it is repaired, it won't acknowledge the PCs or their companions at all (almost as if it can't detect that they're there), instead returning to its role of taking care of the alamosaurs.

The robot: *level 7*

GM Tip: There are some young alamosaurs here too. If one or more PCs do not have a companion, this is an opportunity for them to find one.

If the robot is fixed, the main alamosaur kneels down, inviting the PCs and their companions to climb upon their back. It takes them in the direction they wish to go, but stops and lets them off when it reaches any body of water.

POTENTIAL CYPHERS

If PCs refill their cyphers, here are some options for you to choose from. (Cyphers from the *Cypher System Rulebook* are also fine choices.)

AGLOW

Level: 4

Effect: User glows for one hour, illuminating the surrounding area (within close range) as if daylight.

DINOFLESH

Level: 4

Effect: For one hour, user gains +1 to Armor; eases stealth, surprise, and initiative tasks against dinosaurs.

DINOSPEAK

Level: 4

Effect: For one hour, eases tasks involving studying, understanding, and communicating with dinosaurs (and dinosaur-like creatures).

NESCIUM

Level: 4

Effect: User's euphoric feeling grants them +1 to Intellect Edge for one hour.

SYRINX

Level: 4

Effect: For one hour, user can perfectly mimic songs, coos, roars, snuffles, and other sounds of any creature they hear while the cypher is active, easing all interaction tasks with those creatures, including deception, communication, and training.

TIME ANOMALY

A level 4 time anomaly shimmers in a clearing. The anomaly can refill all the PCs' cyphers up to their limit with level 4 cyphers.

There is also a small container of shiny silver beads threaded on a piece of red string, a vestige of a future the PCs have no context for (like most "remnants").

NIAWARE TIDES

Toward the end of their journey, the PCs' route leads them across an expanse of water known as the Niaware Tides. It's quite wide and very deep, but thankfully there are a couple of ways across it.

A Boat? A Boat! Along the eastern shore of the water, just northwest of the dig site, the PCs can find what looks like an abandoned boat (a "lassaboat") tied to the shore. The large, heavy boat looks worse for wear—it has minor damage and needs about an hour's worth of repair (and a successful difficulty 2 Intellect-based task) in order to make it really water worthy.

The bad part is that a juvenile ghasthound has made the boat into its home, and is ready to defend it at any cost. Ghasthounds are prehistoric pig relatives that as adults can reach 7 feet (2 m) at the shoulder; luckily the juvenile is not yet full size.

The Helico Bridge. This is less an actual bridge than an elaborate system of ropes, pulleys, boulders, giant bones, and large metal pieces that have been welded to each other. It looks a bit like a huge children's playground. Thankfully, it's built at the narrowest part of the water and most of it still looks useable, allowing the PCs to cross the Tides without dealing with the ghasthound. However, the bridge has dangers of its own in the form of a carnosuchus pod.

The carnosuchus is a pliosaur (somewhat resembling a cross between a crocodile and seal) about 10 or 12 feet (3 to 3.5 m) long. A group of three "carnos" patrols the water between the lassaboat and the Helico Bridge. The waters have been low in food sources lately, and they're on the lookout for anything that might be worth taking a bite out of.

Juvenile ghasthound: *level 5, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; health 18; ram attack deals damage and dazes target for one round; bite attack deals 6 damage*

GM intrusion: *The ghasthound rams a PC, knocking the character into the water on a failed Speed defense task.*

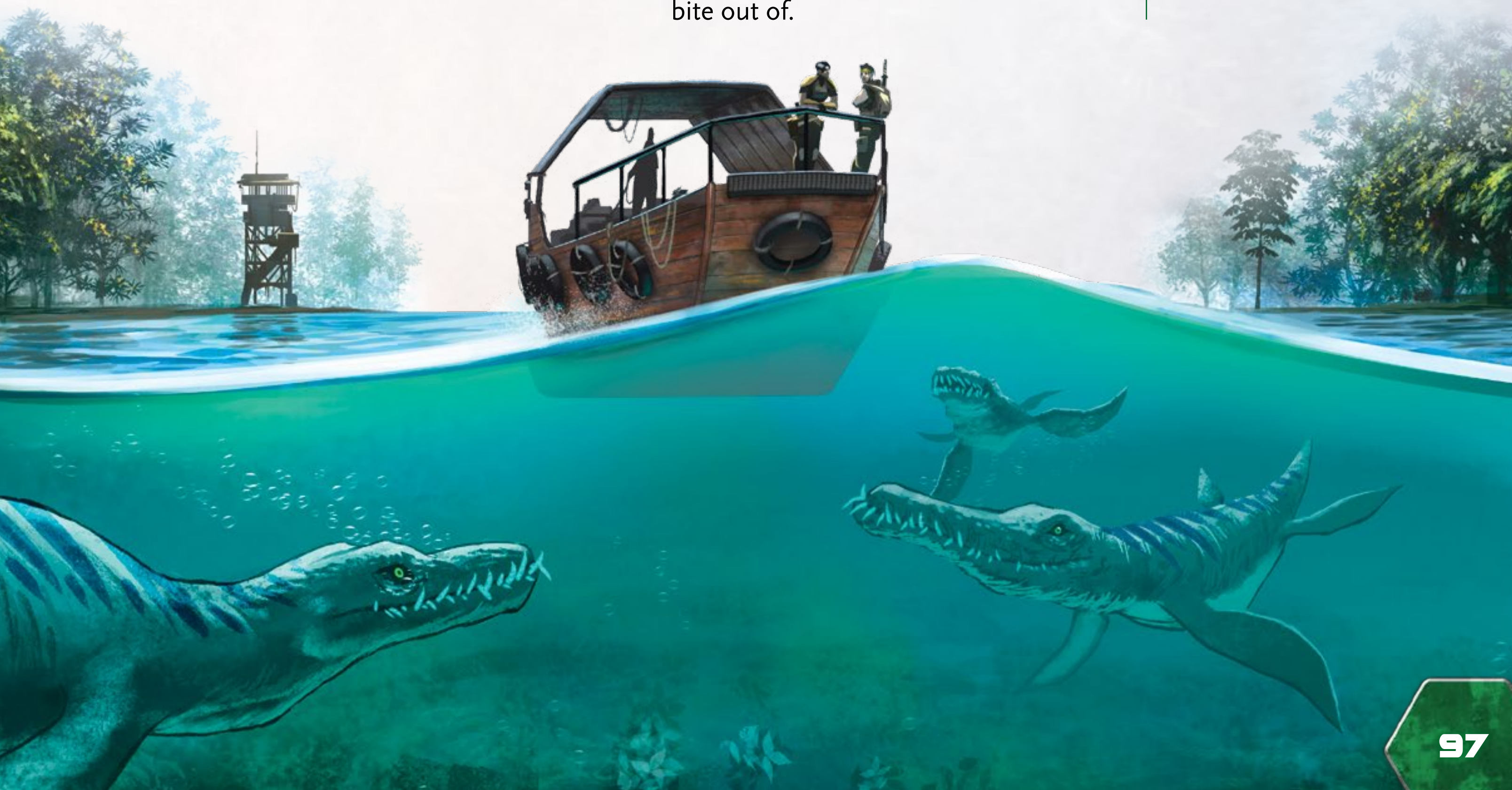
Bridge: *level 6*

GM intrusion: *Something very large swims through the area, creating waves that rock and unsettle everything that's touching the water.*

GM intrusion: *Some type of flying creature lands on one of the characters' heads as they're trying to cross the water.*

Carnosuchus: *level 4, Speed defense and initiative as level 5 due to speed; health 15; bite deals 5 damage*

Lassaboat: *level 5*



BOLCROFT WOODS

While much of Bolcroft Woods is a thick, lush jungle, the stretch closest to the water is burnt black, full of dark stumps and ashy-grey fallen trees. Boulders are cracked as if exposed to unbearable heat. More than a few large animals died here, their blackened bones still rising out of the earth where they fell.

But whatever caused the firestorm, it is long gone. The undergrowth has begun to come back—making this area shrubby and mossed and pocked with tiny pink and white flowers that rest close to the ground.

SATI Spider Crew. If the PCs haven't already dealt with the Spider Crew, they show up as the PCs are investigating the burned area, having tracked the PCs through the wilds.

Nerezza. A feathered micro raptor known as a nerezza flies about, circling the area, likely attracted by the movement of the PCs and their companions. PCs may recognize it for the deadly creature it is (despite its small size) and become worried. Luckily, unless PCs do something to provoke it, the genetically modified, partly cybernetic creature merely observes.

If PCs can't get Carson out of the time anomaly (or become stuck themselves), it's possible the nerezza can provide some aid. It's of a high enough level that it can enter and leave the anomaly without becoming stuck in time.

Cyberdrone. At some point during this encounter, a dragonfly-like robot about the size of a person (an "enhanced cyberdrone") bearing the AIFL logo lands near the PCs. It carries a written message from Jael saying that AIFL is on its way to help secure the device and keep the boy safe, but that the PCs can also give the cyberdrone the devices to carry if they want to send them back to headquarters right away or just keep them in the air, out of SATI's reach.

Cyberdrone, page 137

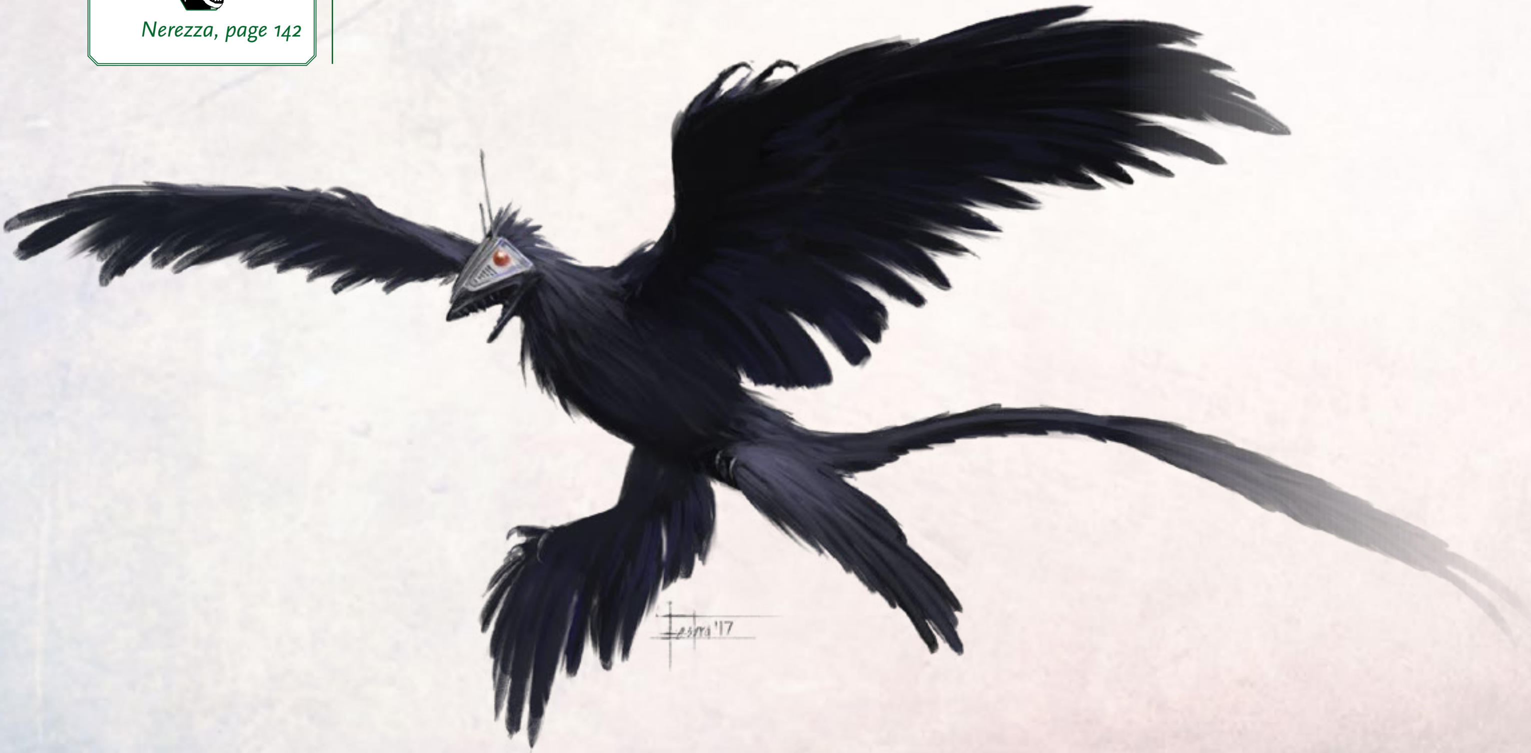
Cyberdrone, enhanced: *level 6, stealth as level 7; Armor 3; carries a large, lockable box that can carry up to 20 pounds of cargo*

SATI Spider Crew, page 94

Jael, page 86

Nerezza: *level 9, stealth as level 10; health 21; flies a short distance each round*

Nerezza, page 142



TIME ANOMALY AT THE CENTER

With about ten minutes of exploring, the PCs discover a level 8 time anomaly at the center of the devastated area. Inside the wavering shimmer that glitches the area, they can see a teenage boy strapped into what looks like a mechanical chair. He has several injuries, the worst of which is one of his legs.

It's Carson; Fernly recognizes him instantly. He still looks like a teenager, the same age he was when he left the future almost 80 years ago.

FREEING CARSON

Normally, time anomalies are safe to enter. But this is an anomaly among anomalies. One, any attempt to reach the teenager requires that a character first force their way through what feels like an invisible wall of syrupy force, requiring a successful difficulty 4 Might task. On a failed roll, the character is expelled, taking 5 points of damage from temporal-electrical discharge. Two, each round a character remains inside the anomaly's center, they must succeed on a difficulty 4 Might defense task, or become stuck in stopped time. Getting a stuck PC out requires another PC (or friendly NPC) to successfully enter, grab the stuck PC, and exit the anomaly. Carson is trapped in the anomaly.

PCs who gain entry to the anomaly's interior and who don't become stuck in stopped time can attempt to work Carson free. He's trapped inside what looks like the remains of a mechanical safety chair—maybe something that he was strapped into when he left the future—that's been crunched out of shape. Getting him free without additional injury is a level 5 task that takes about three rounds. His injured leg isn't broken, but it's cut open and he's torn a ligament in his ankle. He also has cuts on his arms, face, and torso.

On the other hand, the anomaly refills cyphers for those PCs who venture inside and spend a round concentrating, up to their limit with level 8 cyphers.

GM intrusion: *The anomaly's area fluctuates, and a character outside the effect finds themselves inside it, becoming stuck in time on a failed difficulty 4 Might defense task.*

Carson: *level 3*

Fernly, page 94

Mechanical safety chair: *level 5*

Cyphers, page 377

POTENTIAL CYPHERS

Just like a standard time anomaly, the PCs can use this one to refill their cyphers. If they do so, here are some options for you to choose from. (Cyphers from the *Cypher System Rulebook* are also fine choices.)

ACTION DOUBLER

Level: 8

Effect: On the user's next two turns, Speed defense tasks are eased and they can take an extra action.

ALTER APPEARANCE

Level: 8

Effect: User or a targeted creature (requiring an Intellect-based attack if unwilling) changes appearance and form, taking on the semblance of a dinosaur of the same general size for one day.

COMFORT

Level: 8

Effect: User regains 8 points they can split among their Pools as they wish.

INVISI-CLOAK

Level: 8

Effect: User and their clothing and equipment becomes invisible for 10 minutes or until they attack a target or move more than an immediate distance in a round.

LEVITY

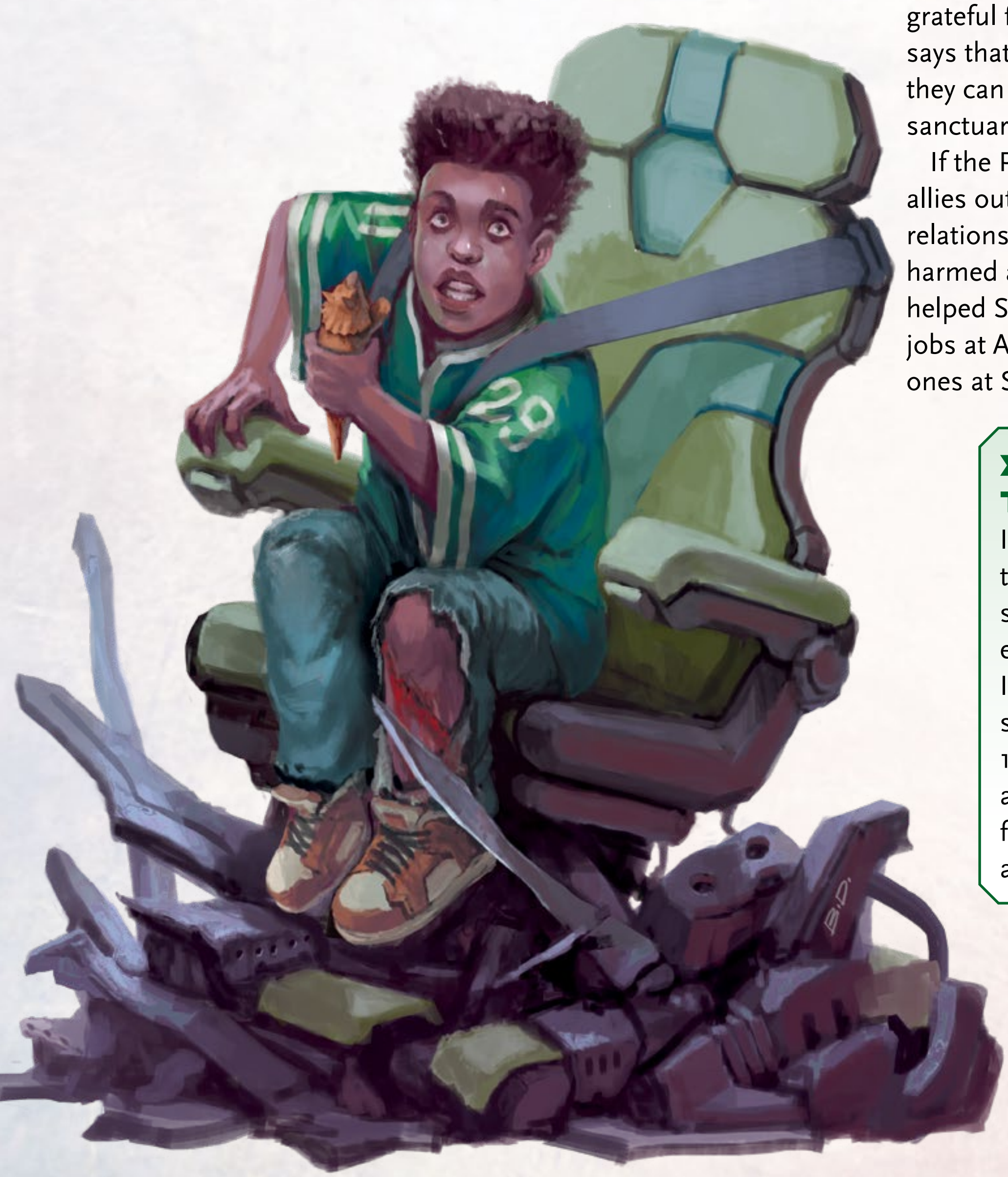
Level: 8

Effect: For one day, gravity affects user about one-third less than normal, easing their movement tasks (such as climbing and jumping) and negating falling damage.

REUNION

If Carson is freed, he is confused. It takes him a bit to recognize Fernly, since as far as he knows, no time has passed. He's carrying a tiny triceratops device that matches the one the PCs have.

It's impossible to know if Carson's been trapped in the anomaly all this time, if he was caught somewhere between the future and here, or if something else happened entirely. But he feels as though he left the future a few minutes ago, and then arrived here just when he started talking to the PCs.



ENDING THE ADVENTURE

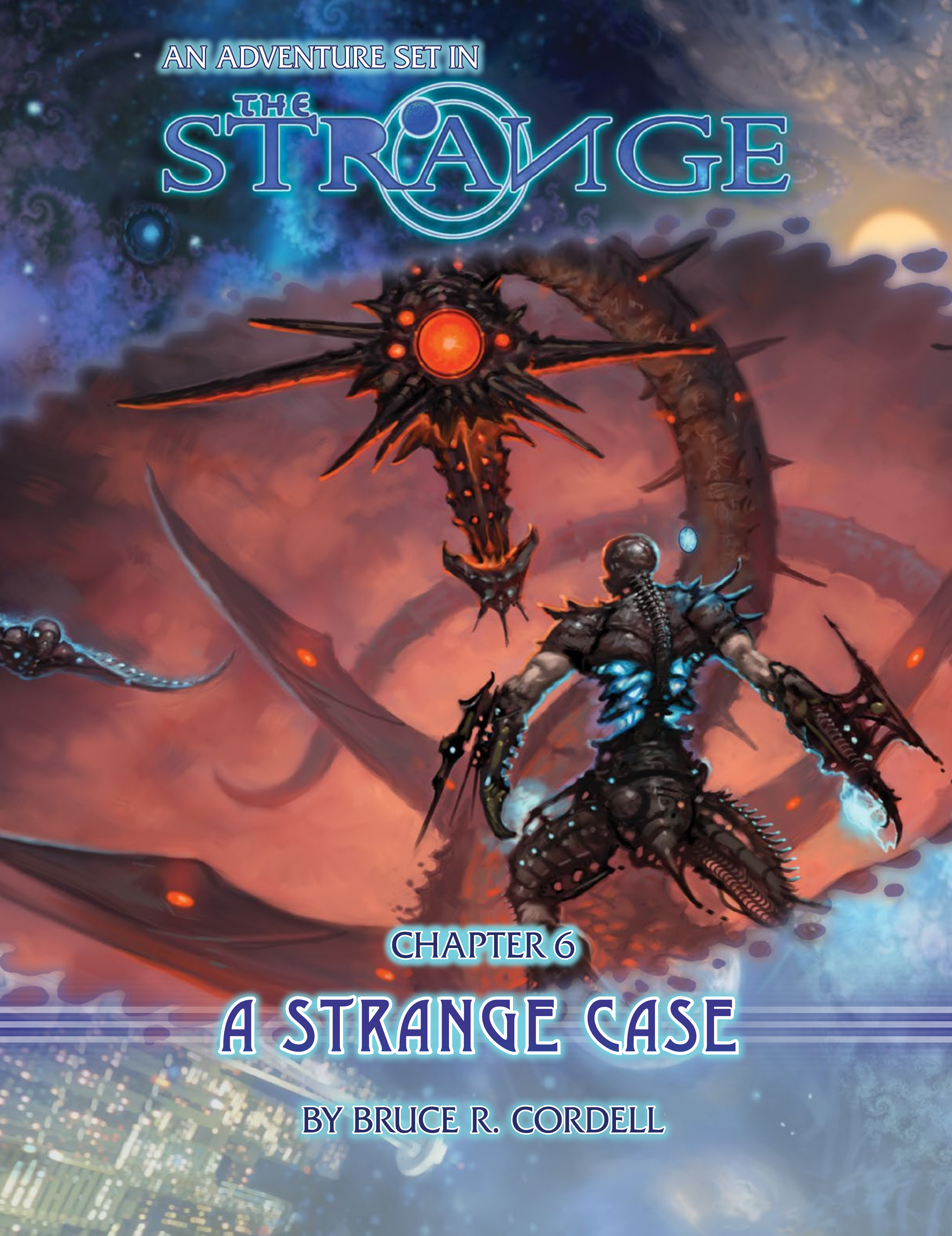
With Fern and Carson reunited and Carson freed, in many ways it's up to Carson what happens to him and to the communication devices. He could choose to go with SATI and see what he can help them learn about time travel and the future. He could choose to help AIFL instead. Or he could choose something else entirely—perhaps to reconnect with his sister and get his bearings before he makes any decision at all.

Either way, he and Fern will be deeply grateful for help PCs provided. Fernly says that if the PCs ever need anything, they can send word to her old dinosaur sanctuary and she will do what she can.

If the PCs directly made enemies or allies out of either SATI or AIFL, those relationships will be deepened or harmed accordingly. In fact, if the PCs helped SATI, they are likely out of their jobs at AIFL, but perhaps will find new ones at SATI if they wish.

XP FOR CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs reach Carson, they each gain 1 XP. If they successfully free Carson, they each gain an additional 1 XP. If they reunite Carson and his sister, they each gain another 1 XP. These awards are in addition to any XP earned from GM intrusions and accomplishments.



AN ADVENTURE SET IN

THE STRANGE

CHAPTER 6

A STRANGE CASE

BY BRUCE R. CORDELL

CHAPTER 6

A STRANGE CASE

CONTENT WARNING

This adventure contains depictions of body horror, harm to children (PCs are transformed into children), and cruelty to animals (rats and roaches).

In this adventure designed for *The Strange,* PCs pursue a rogue Estate operative whose exploits endanger Earth's safety. Success means tracking down the operative's fiction-born accomplice—Mr. Hyde—before the shackles imprisoning Lotan the Sinner, in the land of Ardeyn, are shattered.

Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, page 127

"A Strange Case" is an adventure suitable for four to six first- or second-tier characters. (Tier 1 pregenerated characters are provided for download.)

Throughout this adventure, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by these two symbols.

The first are page references to the *Cypher System Rulebook*, where you can find additional details about that rule, ability, creature, or concept.

The second are page references to *The Strange*, where you can find similar material.

BACKGROUND

The Estate, page 148

Ardeyn, page 160

Lotan, page 162

Former Estate operative Adrien Farkin, while imbedded in Ardeyn as part of his Estate assignment, joined a particularly insidious cult of Lotan. The cult convinced him that Lotan's imprisonment was unjust, and was based on a lie. Further, only someone like him (a recursor from Earth) could free the ancient god. But it wasn't going to be easy. The ritual of release required, among other things, that he eradicate all "weakness and doubt" within himself; otherwise the ritual would surely kill him before he could finish. Thus, operative Farkin began his new quest in secret. He returned to Earth, stole a powerful artifact granting enhanced recursion access from the Estate, then went to ground in a derelict hotel. There, he worked in secret with a newly recruited associate—the infamous physician-scientist Dr. Jekyll—to create a formulation of Jekyll's transformation elixir that is safe for anyone to use, and that would provide the promised clarity of vision. Progress was slow and the results were mixed.

ESTATE
Vigilance

Recursions, page 134

Ultimately, Mr. Hyde (Dr. Jekyll's transformed self) betrayed and killed Farkin. Hyde wanted to be the one to awaken Lotan, gaining all the glory and power for himself. Besides, he already had all the strength and certainty (unhindered sociopathy) the ritual apparently required.

Using the artifact Farkin took from the Estate, Hyde traveled to two other recursions, gathering the last couple of necessary ritual components, and finally to Ardeyn. There he commenced the ritual, which requires a full seven days to complete.

Meanwhile, the Estate has only limited knowledge of why Farkin went rogue and what he might be up to. They've been searching for him ever since. After about 10 months, they finally traced him to the derelict hotel. They sent operatives to find out what Farkin has been up to and apprehend him. Which is when this adventure begins for the PCs.

SYNOPSIS

The adventure involves finding the rogue operative Farkin and, when Farkin turns up murdered, following his protégé Hyde into other recursions.

Start the Game: Bring the players up to speed on the setting for *The Strange*, the characters they'll be playing, basic rules for the Cypher System, and their starting situation.

Wyeth Hotel: The PCs investigate the hotel where rogue operative Adrien Farkin has been holed up for the last ten months. From the encounters completed and clues gathered in the hotel, the PCs learn most of the information presented under Background, including that Mr. Hyde ended up murdering Farkin so *he* can be the one who awakens Lotan.

Recursion Travel: Finding and stopping Mr. Hyde requires that the PCs travel to specific recursions that Hyde passed through, including:

- *Gingerbread House:* A hungry witch must be mollified or defeated to ensure safe passage.
- *Krayol:* She Who Colors is not happy with strangers right now after the mess Hyde made.
- *Ardeyn:* If PCs survive the various traps Mr. Hyde engineered in the recursions PCs trailed him through, they reach the Heart Core in Ardeyn, where Lotan's petrified life energy strains toward freedom. Stopping the ritual, as the operatives on the scene, is up to the characters.

10 months to 2 days ago
Farkin and Dr. Jekyll research new elixir in Wyeth Hotel and gather talismans.

2 days ago
Mr. Hyde kills Farkin, warns Estate, translates to Gingerbread House to get Magic talisman.

1 day ago
Estate gathers operatives (PCs); Hyde translates to Krayol to get Exotic talisman.

Adventure Begins
Operatives (PCs) arrive to investigate Wyeth Hotel; Hyde translates to Ardeyn.

PCs Investigate Wyeth Hotel
PCs learn the truth about what's been happening; Hyde begins 7 day ritual to free Lotan.

7 Day Countdown Begins
PCs track Hyde through recursions, and if successful, finally to Ardeyn.

Finale
PCs either disrupt the ritual before completion, or fail, potentially leading to Lotan's freedom.

START THE GAME

After reading the Background and Synopsis, continue here.

INTRODUCE THE SETTING AND CHARACTERS

Let the players know about the basics of *The Strange* and their role as operatives, if they're new to the setting.

Recursions: In the world of *The Strange*, alternate dimensions called "recursions" nest around Earth. Recursions are limited worlds seeded by fiction—where myths, stories, movies, and games gain life and substance.

Estate Operatives: As operatives of the secret organization called the Estate, PCs are charged with protecting Earth from threats that exist in recursions. Usually and thankfully, recursions remain separate from the normal world. But when the walls between recursion and reality break, the Estate acts.

Hand Out Characters: If your players don't already have characters for *The Strange*, and you're short on time, they could choose characters from downloadable pregenerated characters. (Modern characters created using the *Cypher System Rulebook* could also be used in this adventure, if you came up with a reason why characters not already part of the Estate would get involved, and something that gives the PCs the ability to translate between recursions.)

- Let the players know that each of their characters has previously visited Ardeyn (a recursion where magic exists) which is why they have an Ardeyn focus. A PC's Ardeyn focus replaces their normal focus if they return to Ardeyn.
- Then ask the players to describe and introduce their characters. Encourage them to explain their characters' connections to each other as described under the Background section of their character sheet.

You can download pregenerated first-tier characters for this adventure at: https://mymcg.info/aitcs-pregens

Translation, page 125

TELL THE PCS WHAT THEY KNOW

The PCs begin the adventure having just pulled up outside of the Wyeth Hotel. The PCs know the following about why they're here. If they have further questions, refer to Additional Briefing Details.

Inciting Incident: A little over ten months ago, former Estate operative Adrien Farkin betrayed the institute, injured fellow operatives (one PC still has a scar from the incident), and made off with at least one powerful and dangerous artifact pilfered from the Estate's vault. The Estate has been looking for Farkin ever since.

Fix on Farkin's Location: Two days ago, the Estate finally traced the rogue operative to the Wyeth Hotel in upstate New York. The PCs were gathered, briefed, dispatched via private jet, and have just arrived. Their job is to disrupt whatever Farkin is up to, and if possible, bring Farkin in, one way or the other. So far as the PCs know, Farkin doesn't know the Estate is onto him.

Farkin's Profile: Based on a few things Farkin let slip, messages he sent to concerned acquaintances before he vanished, and some notes on his work computer, the Estate has a guess as to what happened:

Farkin, in his time as an imbedded Estate operative in Ardeyn, was radicalized and brainwashed by Lotan cultists. They convinced him to help them free Lotan. Which would be bad because that would destroy Ardeyn. And Ardeyn is a lynchpin recursion; much of the Earth's protection against planetovores that roam the Strange is thanks to its existence.

Farkin's plan to free Lotan, apparently, requires two things:

- Six unique "symbolic talismans," each from a recursion operating under a different law
- A "shriven, empowered" primary celebrant—requiring a quickened entity, such as Farkin—to be transformed, physically fortified, and rendered immune to doubt

And that's the extent of what the Estate has been able to piece together about Farkin's activities since he disappeared: Presumably he's been trying to find some method to become shriven, and/or he's been gathering these symbolic talismans in different recursions. All while using what he pilfered from the Estate's vault as an aid.

ADDITIONAL BRIEFING DETAILS

If PCs ask for more details about specific topics related to their current case, refer to the following.

Adrien Farkin: Operative Farkin spent years in the field, mostly imbedded in the recursion called Ardeyn, where the law of Magic applies. Then one day a little over ten months ago, he used his credentials to break into the Estate's vault and steal several objects. An inventory after the theft revealed he'd grabbed a bunch of cyphers, but also an artifact in book form: *Worlds Numberless and Strange* (described hereafter).

A somewhat worrying message "Make Lotan Sin Again" was found scrawled inside the looted vault afterward. Why Farkin went rogue and what he planned to do still isn't known.

Farkin has been on the lam for months. An anonymous tip is what finally allowed the Estate to trace Farkin and dispatch operatives just two days before PCs arrive on the scene of the derelict Wyeth Hotel.

Lotan, page 162

No one yet knows this, but the anonymous tip was made by Mr. Hyde, Farkin's former accomplice, right before he translated to another recursion.

***Worlds Numberless and Strange*:** This thick tome hails from the land of Ardeyn, which operates under the law of Magic. As certain powerful artifacts do, the book retains its abilities in all worlds, no matter which rules of existence a recursion operates under, even the Standard Physics of the real world.

The vault catalog describes the book as an "atlas of everything," because its pages have an always-up-to-date list of every recursion seeded by fiction originating from Earth.

The other standout feature described in the catalog is that a bearer willing to risk the atlas' "wrath" can use it as a translation key, allowing travel to any of the specific recursions listed inside it—and, even more significantly, to any indicated location of interest within the target recursion.

(Rumor in Ardeyn suggests that the atlas is a trapped "demigod" called Lore, one of the Seven Incarnations of Ardeyn, confined in book form. Attempts to force the tome to create on-the-fly translation keys presumably angers it.)

WYETH HOTEL

PCs arrive at about 11 am on a Tuesday morning.

Derelict: The derelict hotel hunches at the center of an empty parking lot (empty except for the PCs' vehicle). Some of the hotel windows are boarded, others are shattered like blinded eyes. A sign—WYETH—is twisted and rusted, creaking as it sways in a slight breeze.

Layout: The hotel has two stories, with a main lobby entrance situated along the northwest corner of the structure.

Casual scrutiny of the outside suggests no one's been here in quite some time.

CHECKING OUTSIDE THE WYETH HOTEL

PCs who walk around the hotel's exterior looking for anything interesting find the following.

Small Burial Mounds: In the grassy verge between parking lot and cement hotel foundation, PCs discover several heaped mounds of earth. Small plant growth on the mounds suggests they've been there for at least few months. Digging up the mounds reveals decaying remains of a couple dog-sized rats with weirdly human-like faces, contorted with fury.

Penned Symbols: Arcane symbols are drawn in permanent black marker at irregular intervals on the outer walls at about head height.

If a PC succeeds on a difficulty 4 magic lore, Ardeyn lore, or similar task, they believe the symbols are intended to "hide" the hotel from casual notice. The character knows that usually such things have no effect on Earth, where Standard Physics holds sway. Whoever put them here must have had Paradox-like abilities that—

Wait, that's weird . . .

Windows: Ground-floor windows are boarded with plywood; about half the upper-story windows are boarded. The ones that are not boarded are smashed. Prying away the plywood with a prybar is difficulty 4 Might task, while clambering up the side of the hotel to get to access to a broken window on the second floor is a difficulty 4 climbing task. Success with either could allow PCs access to the hotel, if they fail to discover the main doors are unlocked.

ENTRANCES

Besides the main lobby entrance, PCs could use several other secondary entrances (see map). PCs could also enter through the windows, as previously noted.

Secondary Entrances: The secondary entrances are each secured with padlocks. PCs could try to pick the locks, try to force them with a Might task and some kind of tool like a prybar, or just cut a lock off if they obtain bolt cutters.

Lobby Entrance: Double glass doors, both covered in plywood, are closed; however, there is no padlock. If PCs try the doors, they open (with a squeal of rusted hinges) directly into the lobby.

GENERAL INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

Only some areas shown on the Wyeth Hotel map contain useful information and/or encounters. Locations not described, such as the Hotel Offices, some of the Conference Halls, and all the actual hotel rooms on the second floor (not shown on the map) are simply empty and derelict.

Derelict Rooms: The walls are cracked, peeling, and mold-speckled. Broken furniture sags on rotted carpet stained by water and who knows what else.

Move Along: There's no need to make the PCs explore every empty room. Rather, skip forward by saying "you search a couple of rooms without finding anything," until the PCs come to an area containing something out of the ordinary.

Map of Wyatt Hotel, page 106

Secondary entrance: *level 5*

Padlock: *level 5*

Paradox, page 30

GM intrusion: *Magic flares and the character studying a penned symbol suddenly loses interest and walks away in a daze. If shaken, they regain their senses, but don't remember trying to leave the area.*

Second floor, page 106

LOBBY

A trail of empty fast-food bags and containers—with familiar logos for local burger places, taco joints, pizza shops, chicken shacks, etc.—haphazardly leads from the Lobby to the Restaurant (called "Wyeth Restaurant and Lounge" according to a sign).

SECOND FLOOR

Other than evidence that a couple of people were living in two of the hotel rooms (one of whom, had taste for Victorian-style clothing), nothing of significance can be found on the second floor.

BASEMENT

Nothing of significance can be found in the basement other than water-ruined storage, a broken furnace, and regular rats and bugs.

RESTAURANT

Several of the original chairs and tables remain, while the rest are broken or at least bent.

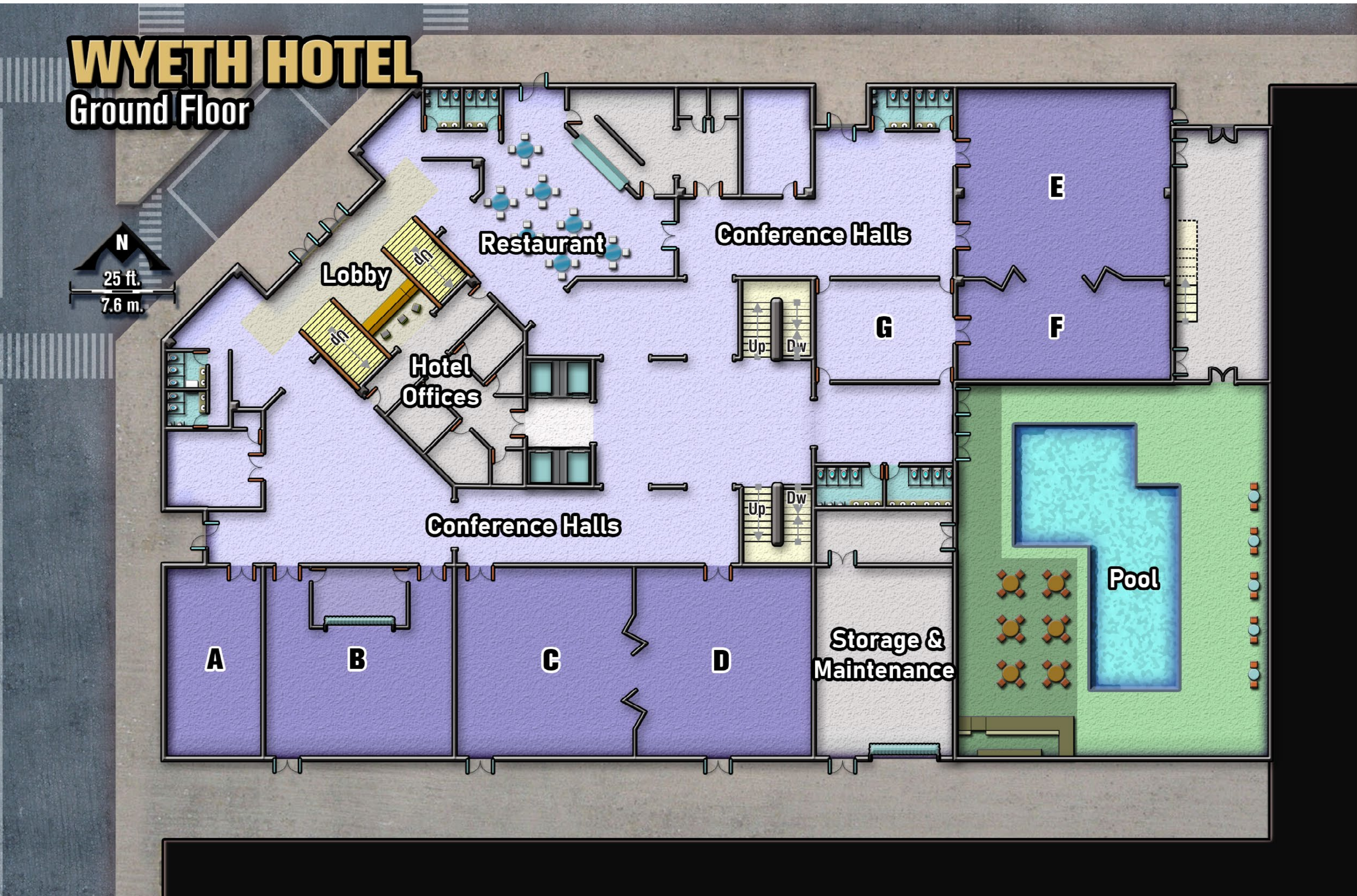
Trash: Garbage litters the floor in ankle-deep heaps. The trash is mostly fast-food bags and containers.

Roaches Of Unusual Size: Six big bugs, each the size of a two-liter bottle, nest in the garbage. The creatures are remade roaches, created by experiments with Dr. Jekyll's transformation elixir. The six roaches are far more aggressive than regular roaches and attack intruders a few rounds after they enter.

Remade roach (6): *level 2, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; three roaches attack as one level 4 creature that deals 4 damage*

GM intrusion: *The roach sprays a mist in the character's face, blinding them until the end of their next turn. Tasks attempted by blinded characters are hindered by two steps.*

Clue—Receipts: If a PC sifts through the rotting trash to find clues, they discover receipts with purchase dates ranging from about ten months ago to dates from about three days ago.



CONFERENCE HALLS

The associated rooms are distinguished by letters from A to H. Several contain important (sometimes dangerous) clues as to what's happened in the hotel.

(The conference rooms each have a distinct name whose first letter also functions as room label: A for Alabama, B for Boston, C for Colorado, D for Delaware, E for Everett, F for Florida, and H for Hawaii.)

CONFERENCE ROOM A

The interior door to this room stands ajar.

Dead Animals: The strong smell of dead animals lingers in the air. Cages cover the walls in this room. Half the cages contain normal-sized rats, all dead (probably of starvation). A quarter contain dead rats apparently killed by weird cancerous growths and mutation. And the last quarter contain rats killed by some combination of mutation and heat, as if they were carbonized in a blast furnace.

Experimental Failures: These animals failed to survive Farkin's and Dr. Jekyll's initial experiments to create a transformation elixir safe for use by creatures other than Dr. Jekyll.

CONFERENCE ROOM B

The two sets of interior doors to this room are barred (jury rigged with lumber and nails) from the outside, and can be pried away with a minute's effort.

Bodies Under Sheets: Hotel bedsheets cover seventeen lumpy forms scattered on the floor. Investigation reveals human bodies, all burned to a carbonized state.

Experimental Failures: These unhoused people, unfortunate victims lured by Farkin and Dr. Jekyll to the hotel with promises of fast food, died from ingestion of unperfected transformation elixir.

GM intrusion: *The body the character is investigating collapses into ash and chunks of body-shaped charcoal, blinding the character until they use an action to clear their eyes.*

IF PCS CALL FOR HELP

At certain points in the adventure, PCs may call back to headquarters for backup, aid, or new instructions. If they do, they're connected to their mission's handler, Investigations Chief Lawrence Keaton, who previously handled a couple of their past missions.

For example, after finding evidence of animal and human testing (such as what is found in conference rooms A and B, respectively), they may request some sort of toxic removal squad to remove the bodies. And if they eventually discover Farkin is dead, they might call in to let their superiors know that they've completed their remit, and Farkin has at least been "dealt" with.

In response, the Estate (as handled by Keaton) does its best to provide resources or new instructions. For instance, to follow up on the examples above, the Estate dispatches a team to clear out the animal and human remains, which will arrive within ten hours. If PCs report Farkin's death, Keaton tells the characters that they still need to recover *Worlds Numberless and Strange*. If the PCs have learned about Hyde assuming Farkin's goal, Keaton instructs them to find Hyde and stop him from completing his dangerous ritual, using whatever means are necessary.

If PCs express a desire to hand the operation over to "the experts," Keaton reminds them that the PCs number among less than a couple of dozen quickened operatives of the Estate able to translate. The characters are the tip of the spear for this mission; for now, it remains in their capable hands.

Besides, if what the PCs eventually discover about the ritual timetable is accurate, it's possible they have only days until Hyde attempts it.

Lawrence Keaton, page 149

Quickened beings are rare individuals who are aware of and can travel between recursions of the Strange.

CONFERENCE ROOM C

The interior doors to these rooms have been taken off their hinges.

Furniture Pile: Chairs, beds, bureaus, and other hotel furnishings are piled in the center of the conference room, creating a mini-mountain of rotting wood, leather, and fabric. A strong urine and feces smell lingers here.

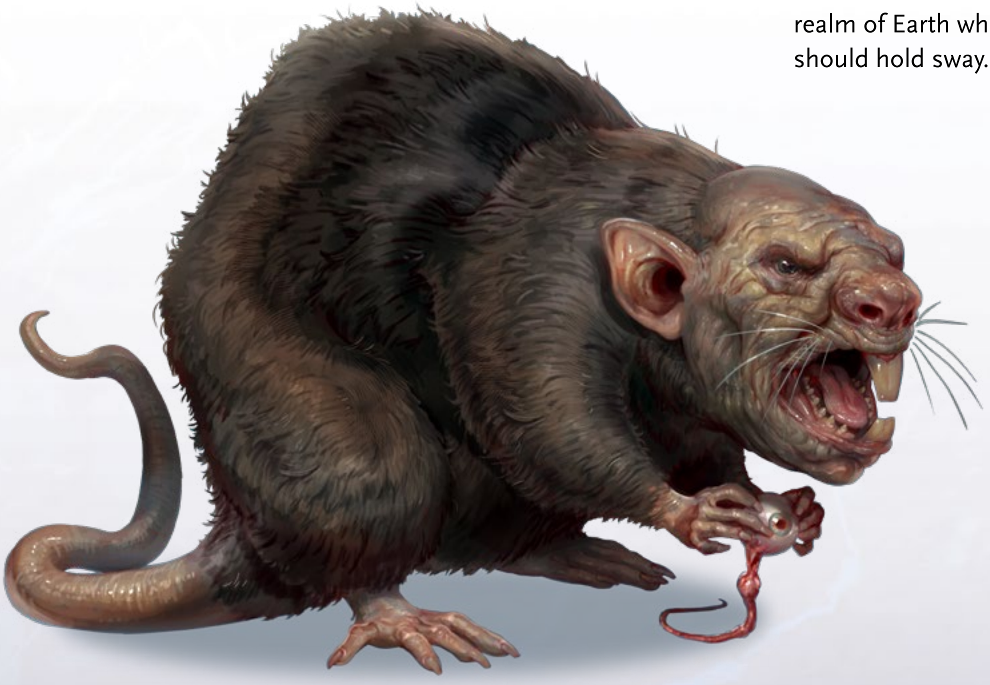
Loose Pages: Besides the furniture, PCs spy a scattering of loose lab notebook pages littering the pile. PCs who succeed on a difficulty 3 perception task notice a sort of trail of torn-out lab notebook pages leading from conference room H, across the hall, into the furniture pile here in room C.

The pages have been roughly torn free and are partially chewed, but most of them retain a visible page number and the project name *Transformation Elixir Trials* written in the margin; see below when PCs have a chance to investigate further.

GM intrusion: *The rat curses the character out with its too-human mouth, saying something like "Gonna eat your eyeballs you smelly fuck!" The character is so unsettled by this that their actions for the next few rounds are hindered.*

That's No Rat: Five enormous rats, each at least 70 pounds (32 kg), with facial features horrifically similar to a human's, infest the rotting furniture pile. The creatures are remade rats, created by experiments with Dr. Jekyll's transformation elixir. They're far more aggressive than regular rats and attack intruders a few rounds after they enter.

Remade rat (5): *level 3, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; health 13; bite deals 4 damage*



Transformation Elixir Trials: PCs who spend a little time can gather and reassemble a lab notebook from the pages the remade rats stole from conference room H. When assembled, the PCs have a loose lab notebook filled with biochemical jargon, equations, and lots of trial data on cockroaches, rabbits, rats, and humans. The details of most trails end with BATCH FAILED in big red letters.

The notebook starts with neatly lettered handwriting (Farkin's). Midway through after a cascade of complete failure, the handwriting switches to neatly flowing cursive script (Dr. Jekyll's hand, though this isn't called out). This is when the experiments start bearing fruit, if the trial data is to be believed.

If a character takes a few minutes to study this notebook and succeeds on difficulty 5 biochemistry, medicine, or similar task, they discover that whoever was writing in the second hand (Jekyll) began experimenting to adapt something called the "original formulation," so subjects other than "me" can survive being injected with it.

The experiments include a lot of last-century "science" such as cranioscopy, galvanism, leeching, and homeopathy, but those methods somehow seem to improve the formulation with each batch, if the data recorded is accurate. PCs with knowledge of such things would say that somehow, the experimenter was managing to call on the law of Mad Science even here in the realm of Earth where Standard Physics should hold sway.

CONFERENCE ROOM D

The interior door to this conference room is barred from the outside, like room B.

Sounds Behind the Door: PCs outside the door can hear faint noises from the other side, sounding almost like someone attempting to talk around a gag.

Mutated Survivors: Two unhoused people, transformed into remade humans, are secured here. They're both 7 feet (2 m) tall, bulging with muscle, and devoid of the least scrap of human kindness. Blank expanses of unbroken skin replace what should be their mouths. They attack anyone who lets them out.

As Farkin and Jekyll (who was unconsciously becoming more ruled by Mr. Hyde as they remained on Earth) grew closer to creating a general-use transformation elixir, humans started surviving the process, though not without some complications.

Talking to Dylan: If one of the remade humans divides and creates the frightened human Dylan Clancy, PCs can question the terrified man. He recalls agreeing to come, along with some other people like him, to the hotel because there was an offer of free food and a place to sleep. He remembers eating some tacos, which were fantastic, but not much else after that, other than two men seemed to be running the hotel, not just one.

CONFERENCE ROOMS E, F, AND G

These rooms are dusty, unused, and derelict conference rooms.

CONFERENCE ROOM H (THE LABORATORY)

The sliding doors to this area are shut. Inside, shelving units along the walls sag with jars and glassware filled with different fluids, a few luminescent. Metal worktables jam the limited floor space. Several layers of chemical formulae (penned with variously colored permanent markers) share space on each table with jumbles of scientific equipment, including microscopes, centrifuges, pipettes, autoclaves, and more.

The PCs identify the following points of interest that bear further investigation: a bookshelf, the examination table, and an IV bag with glowing fluid still in it.

Bookshelf: Lab notebooks lie scattered on—and on the floor in front of—this shelf. It looks like animals had a go at the books, as several of the laboratory notebooks are chewed, and pages are ripped free. Most of the notebooks found here are blank.

But PCs find the following points of interest:

- *Missing Notebook:* Remade rats carried off the laboratory notebook where the experimental trials conducted here were recorded. The PCs may have already found that notebook (*Transformation Elixir Trials*) in conference room C. However, if they didn't, they do observe a trail of rat-chewed lab notebook pages leading to conference room C.
- *Lotan (Lab Notebook):* One book immediately stands out from the others for its prominent title: *Lotan*.

LAB NOTEBOOK TITLED *LOTAN*

The handwriting in this lab notebook matches the handwriting in the first part of the *Transformation Elixir Trials* notebook—it's Farkin's.

After perusing it for a few minutes, the PCs learn the following information.

Ritual Requirements:

- *Recursor Celebrant:* Only a recursor—someone quickened who originates from outside of Ardeyn—can celebrate the ritual. A recursor is required because their quickened soul has a special resonance with the Strange that regular people lack.
- *Shriven:* The ritual requires a recursor celebrant whose mind is cleansed of the tiniest seed of uncertainty and doubt, and whose body is supernaturally fortified; otherwise they won't be able to stand up to the rigors of a seven-day, nonstop ritual.
- *Ritual Components:* The celebrant must gather "symbolic talismans" from six different recursions, each operating under a different law of existence.

Remade human: *level 5; health 22; two unarmed attacks deal 6 damage each*

GM intrusion: *The remade human divides, creating a regular, frightened human, and a remade human who, if anything, seems larger and stronger; their tasks are all eased and they regain 1 health each round).*

Dylan Clancy: *level 2*

Lotan the Sinner, page 162

Ardeyn, page 160

Recruiting Dr. Henry Jekyll: With his many failures to transform himself mounting, Farkin grows desperate.

He uses the "wonderfully versatile" *Worlds Numberless and Strange* to find an "early" version of Dr. Henry Jekyll, one not yet given over to his darker self, who can help Farkin create an elixir to fortify and shrive him.

Farkin notes that it's good to finally have someone he can confide in, not to mention someone with the knowledge and skill to do what needs to be done.

Ritual Location: The journal doesn't name a location, saying only, "*Worlds Numberless and Strange* will get me to the place where the Maker can be restored."

Last Few Journal Entries: In the last few journal entries (dated just a couple of days before the Estate "traced" Farkin to the Wyeth), Farkin worries a little that Dr. Jekyll seems different. But probably, Farkin notes, "he's just excited, like me. He's become as convinced as I that Lotan should be freed."

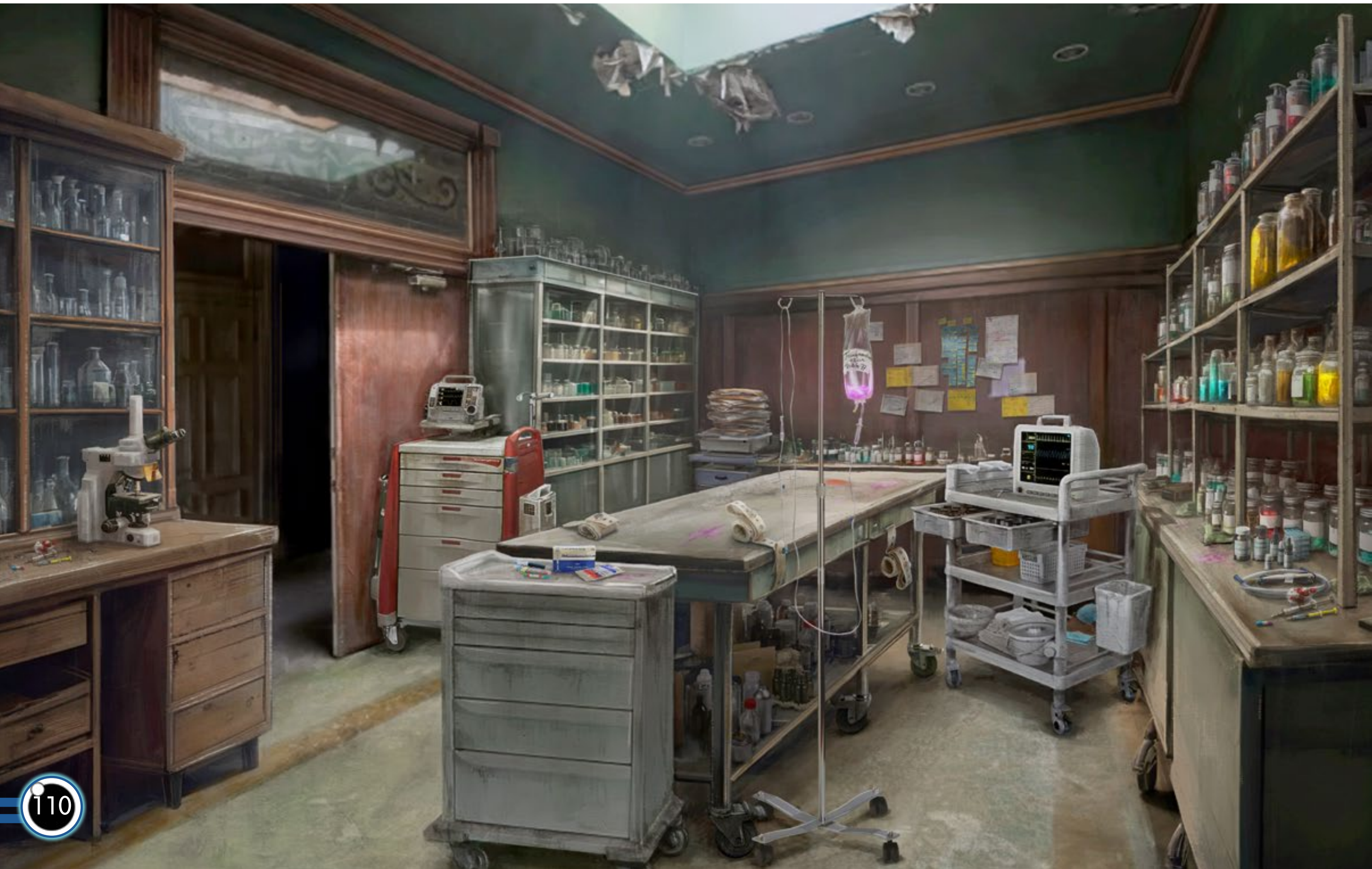
The final entry reads, "The elixir is complete."

Examination Table: Clamps suitable for securing a human adorn this slanted, hospital-bed-like table. The table is stained with all manner of dried fluids. An IV bag containing a residual amount of glowing, purplish fluid hangs above the table. The words "transformation elixir—Batch 77" are scribed in a cursive hand on a piece of masking tape stuck to the IV bag. A side table holds an open box of syringes.

Transformation Elixir: Recursor PCs who study the fluid in the IV bag and succeed on a difficulty 3 Intellect task determine that the fluid represents a potential cypher (created when an aliquot of fluid is drawn into a nearby syringe; there is enough fluid in the IV bag for 3 doses/cyphers) with a variable effect depending on the subject who injects it.

So long as the contents of the IV bag are not transferred to syringes, the bag's fluid contents don't count against a PC's cypher limit.

Finding and Identifying Cyphers, page 310



TRANSFORMATION ELIXIR—BATCH 77

Level: 1d6 + 1

Earth Form: A syringe filled with glowing, purplish fluid

Effect: The elixir has three different effects, depending on who uses it.

Normal Subject: If given to a non-quickened subject (which doesn't include the PCs), the subject is 50% likely to burn to ash, and 50% likely to transform into a "remade" creature. Generally, remade creatures gain 3 levels and become filled with unquenchable sadistic glee and no sense of self-preservation.

Quickened Subject: The character grows larger and more bestial for 10 minutes, during which time they attack any and every living creature within short range. They gain +8 to their Might Pool, +1 to their Might Edge, +2 to their Speed Pool, and +1 to their Speed Edge. While transformed, they can't spend Intellect points for any reason other than to try to change back to their normal form before the 10-minute duration is over (a difficulty 2 task).

Transformed Subject: If given to someone already transformed (usually requiring a successful touch attack), the transformation ends. However, if given to Mr. Hyde, it turns him into Dr. Jekyll for 2 rounds, then Hyde returns.

CAMCORDER FOOTAGE

If PCs activate the camcorder (which still has 46% battery charge), they can fold out the video screen and watch what's been recorded:

PC operatives recognize Adrien Farkin as he walks into the field of view and settles into a pool chair. "I'm ready, Dr. Jekyll."

"You don't look ready," comes a voice with an odd British accent from somewhere offscreen.

"Just nervous." Farkin crosses his arms. "This is for Lotan. For justice. I can't survive the ritual without it. Shriven of all doubt. Like *you* achieved, in the end."

Another figure, presumably Dr. Jekyll, moves in, blocking the lens. "Exactly right," he says. "No need to be nervous. Batch 77 is ace."

"I know. Afterward, I won't be. Let's do this already."

The view clears as Jekyll moves to Farkin's side. He's an ordinary-looking man clad in a turn-of-the-19th-century suit complete with top hat. He produces a syringe charged with luminous purple fluid.

Farkin nods.

Jekyll injects the seated man and steps out of the field of view.

The rogue operative blinks rapidly, a grin spreading across his face. "I feel it! It's working! It's such a relief—"

Farkin explodes in purplish fire, rendered to so much ash and charcoal in seconds.

Dr. Jekyll steps back into view. Except it's someone else. Someone larger, muscles bulging through his clothing as if straining to grow bigger still. A thick pelt of purplish hair covers every inch of his skin, including his face.

The figure doffs his top hat to the camera in a mock bow, tittering in a creepy falsetto. "Oopsie! I injected Farkin with Batch 27 by accident. What a silly goose!"

The furred figured straightens to his full, towering height. "Dear viewers, Estate operatives, I presume. I am the one who left the anonymous tip; but are you already too late? I wonder, will you be able to catch me in time? After I collect the last couple of talismans, I—Mr. Edward Hyde—will celebrate the ritual. *I* will free Lotan in the land of Ardeyn. And unlike poor deluded Farkin, I know exactly how awful that's going to be for everyone. Isn't it brilliant?"

The video ends.

Quickened, page 22

Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, page 127

TL;DR

The camcorder footage shows Farkin—seated in a chair—receiving an injection from a second figure, which causes him to spontaneously combust. The second figure reveals himself as a purple-furred, top-hat-wearing Mr. Hyde. Hyde indicates he intends to celebrate the ritual to free Lotan in Farkin's place.

If a PC attempts to understand Mr. Hyde's motives in tipping off the Estate and succeeds on a difficulty 3 psychology or similar Intellect-based roll, they believe Hyde is trying to lure them purely because he's a sadist and can't help himself. He's probably intending to set up an ambush. Also, he delights in boasting, and who else can he boast to best but those who truly understand his plans?

SYMBOLIC TALISMANS

These sparse notes penned by Farkin indicate that qualifying symbolic talismans can be almost anything from a recursion, so long as it is something gathered by a visiting recursor, and that when the item translates, it maintains its essential form.

Farkin indicates he already has four, but still needs to acquire the last two symbolic talismans, which he intends to do after he's attained his new "state of being" that will allow him to survive the ritual.

The talismans he's decided to go after are:

Magic: A candy cane from a recursion called Gingerbread House. (He writes that it's too bad he can't just use something from Ardeyn, but oh well.)

Exotic: A crayon from a recursion called Krayol. (He writes that he expects to be "most unsettled" visiting this two-dimensional land, except that, no, he won't be, once the batch formulation is perfected!)

Farkin's journal indicates he's already acquired the following talismans:

Standard Physics: His own smartphone from Earth.

Psionics: A psychic beetle he collected from a recursion called Atom Nocturne.

Substandard Physics: A bronze arrowhead from a recursion called Lost Lands.

Mad Science: Victorian eyeglasses taken from Dr. Jekyll in a recursion called Steam London. The notes indicate that while acquiring these eyeglasses, Farkin decided to enlist Jekyll's help; he was having little success strengthening himself on his own, despite his abilities.

Symbolic talisman: *level 3*

Recursion key, page 130

Hertzfeld, page 149

Worlds Numberless and Strange, page 127

Rules of Translation, page 125

Camcorder footage, page 111

Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, page 126

Conference Room B, page 107

POOL

The pool is drained and empty. Investigators immediately notice a few oddities: a camcorder, burnt remains in a chair, and (visible only to quickened characters) a glowing hairline fissure in the pool wall.

Camcorder on Tripod: A camcorder (a hand-held video recorder popular before the ascent of smartphones) set on a tripod faces on a human-shaped spot of blackened material burned into a pool chair along the eastern wall.

A folded piece paper torn from a lab notebook is taped to the side of the camcorder. Unfolded, words in cursive script read: *It's ill to loose the bands that God decreed to bind.* —E.H.

If they switch the camcorder on, PCs can review the footage.

Burnt Remains: The remains posed in the pool chair are consistent with the kind of carbonized, ashy remains PCs found in conference room B. The chair is somewhat scorched from when the person in it spontaneously combusted.

The victim's identity is revealed if PCs review the camcorder footage.

A coffee-stand next to the table contains another lab notebook, unburned. It is titled *Symbolic Talismans.*

Glowing Hairline Fissure in Pool Wall: A 5-foot (1.5 m) long vertical fissure is etched into the center of the southern wall of the pool (in the deep end). The fissure glows with a faint pearlescent light. Only quickened creatures (like the PCs) can see it.

PCs who study the fissure feel a translation-adjacent "tingle," similar to that emitted by a recursion key. This isn't a phenomenon the PCs have encountered before, but if they check back with the Estate, Research Chief Hertzfeld confirms the effect is consistent with someone's use of *Worlds Numberless and Strange*. The residual key isn't mobile, but recursors could use it to translate to the exact same location in the connected recursion as whoever created it (which is Mr. Hyde). However, the fissure is gradually fading. It'll be gone within a few more weeks.

A character who understands the fissure is a recursion key and succeeds on a difficulty 4 Intellect task discovers it enables translation to a recursion called "Gingerbread House" that operates under the law of Magic. PCs must actually go there to learn more, assuming the characters don't have access to other sources of information.

NEXT STEPS

PCs decide their next course of action.

REQUEST AID

If PCs report back to the Estate, see If PCs Call for Help.

IF PCS DO NOT WATCH CAMCORDER FOOTAGE

PCs could charge ahead and translate using the fissure in the pool without watching the video. Which is ok; they'll realize the person they're pursuing is Edward Hyde, not Farkin, from clues discovered along the way, and especially if they finally catch him.

TRANSLATING

Eventually, PCs must move into another reality, as described under Recursion Travel.

If PCs Call for Help, page 107

RECURSION TRAVEL

A few things to consider as PCs prepare to follow Mr. Hyde:

Limits of Translation: As recursors, PCs have the ability to travel—to translate—into other worlds. But even for operatives of the Estate, initiating a translation requires that a recursor have an object from the target recursion, personal knowledge by having translated to that recursion before, or a recursion key. Even then, the specific location where a PC appears in a recursion they've translated to is either a default location or the last place the PC was in before they translated out of that world.

All of which is to say that PCs can't just translate to Ardeyn and hope to easily find Mr. Hyde somewhere on (or under!) the huge continent that makes up the massive world.

Follow the Translation Trail: Artifacts break the rules, even the already-incredible rules around translating between fictionally seeded worlds. For instance, the artifact *Worlds Numberless and Strange* can emulate recursion keys on the fly, granting access to any recursion described in its pages (which is most if not all of them). Moreover, the tome acts like a recursion key that points to a specifically desired location within that world.

And importantly for the PCs' situation, using the tome leaves behind a crack in reality that heals within a few weeks. Until it disappears, the lingering fissure can be used to follow the book-bearer into the connected recursion—and to the specific location within that recursion that they translated into.

TIME TO TRANSLATE

If all the PCs work together, they can enter a 10-minute translation trance focused on the recursion key, the fissure in the pool, or in one of the later fissures left in a recursion Hyde visited.

Then, one PC must succeed on an Intellect-based task to translate with a difficulty equal to the level of the target recursion (level 4 in the case of Gingerbread House). The translation task is eased by 2 steps; one due to the help of the other PCs, and another for the asset provided by fissure itself. (The task can be further eased if the PC is trained in translation or applies Effort.) On a failed task, the recursor can attempt a reroll, but *must* use Effort (as per normal rules for retrying a task).

On a successful roll, PCs translate into the target recursion. PCs potentially take on new appearances and possessions appropriate to the recursion, as described for each location PCs may visit in this adventure. They also gain a new focus ability appropriate to the new world (as noted under each recursion described in this adventure), while losing the focus they used in the recursion they just left.

Initiating a Translation, page 125

The Strange *rulebook uses the term "ease" to mean overcoming negative translation effects more quickly. This adventure uses "ease" to mean "reduce the difficulty of a task by one or more steps."*

GINGERBREAD HOUSE

GINGERBREAD HOUSE ATTRIBUTES

Level: 4

Laws: Magic

Playable Species: Human children

Foci: None; children have no foci

Trait: Sweet. For each minute a character spends nibbling candy, they regain 1 Pool point.

What a Recursor Knows About Gingerbread House: Upon arrival via translation, a recursor knows the recursion's attributes as well as the following.

- Gingerbread House operates under the law of Magic, seeded by the various versions of the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel."
- The hungry witch is especially hungry for children.
- Other than the witch and her creations, only children come to her house. That includes PCs.
- The dwelling which makes up most of the recursion and for which the recursion is named is built of gingerbread and garnished with candy decorations. Even the windows are made of clear sugar.

Gingerbread House is a small recursion, consisting of the eponymous house itself and the immediate few acres surrounding it, including a belt of dark woods that turn explorers back who press to its edges, and which sometimes generate a pack of hungry wolves (level 3).

Gingerbread person: *level 4; bash attack inflicts 4 damage*

GM intrusion: *Sticky pavers (or cotton-candy grass) trip the character, causing them to fall instead of taking an action this round.*

Marshmallow kestrel: *level 3, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; attacks by attempting to fly down target's throat, suffocating them for 2 damage each round (ignores Armor) until the target succeeds on a Might task to expel the kestrel*

GINGERBREAD HOUSE ARRIVAL

A few things are apparent as PCs arrive.

It's Mostly Candy: PCs translate into the recursion standing on a path made of peppermint pavers leading toward a house made entirely of gingerbread and candy. Dark, impenetrable woods surround the house.

PCs Are Children: The PCs can only take the form of human children between 9 and 12 years old. Have each PC describe what they look like as a child (either how they used to look, or a child they choose to resemble in this recursion).

Equipment and Cyphers: PCs who arrive by translation have "candy" versions of their equipment and cyphers, which look yummy but otherwise work mostly as expected. A gun could take the form of a hard-candy crossbow or a fruit-leather blowgun, a rope could become a licorice strand, and so on.

No Focus: The PCs in this recursion evoke kids. As such, the characters simply don't have access to a focus; they haven't had enough life experience (according to the narrative) to have developed one.

No Fissure: There's no return fissure leading back to the Wyeth Hotel on Earth. Nor do PCs spy an exit fissure. Which means the PCs need to explore further to find where Hyde exited, if he's still in the recursion, or if the residents of the house stopped him. (Dear reader, they did not.)

APPROACHING THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE

Mr. Hyde riled up the residents on his visit a few days ago (where he acquired a candy cane before leaving). They're still on alert, as he intended.

Defenses on Alert: PCs can get to within about short range of the house before they risk being detected by a gingerbread person sentry posted on an upper balcony of the house.

Sneaking: If characters choose, they could attempt to sneak around and try to get in through a window in back of the house; doing so requires they succeed on a difficulty 4 hiding task.

Talking: Alternatively, PCs could hail the watcher on the balcony and try to talk. They must succeed on a difficulty 5 persuasion task to get the gingerbread person to listen to them and not sound the alarm. If PCs succeed on another persuasion task, they'll allow them to enter and talk to the witch without a fight.

Fighting: Otherwise when a watcher sees the PCs, they play a sound on a caramel trumpet. Two additional gingerbread people charge out the front door of the house, fury burning in their frosted eyes, shouting "Another intruder!" (The gingerbread person on the balcony moves to stand as bodyguard of the witch inside.)

Marshmallow Kestrels: One round after the gingerbread people attack, two bone-white birds fly from where they were perched on the roofline. These two marshmallow kestrels assist the gingerbread people.

INSIDE THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE

Every structural and decorative element in the house, as well as every piece of furniture (other than the stove), is made of some kind of candy. It's easy enough to pry (or bite) a piece off as an action.

> "Nibble, nibble, little mouse,
> Who is nibbling at my house?"
> —Hungry witch, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*

MAIN FLOOR

Past the entry hall, where cotton-candy cloaks hang, is the kitchen, which takes up most of the main floor.

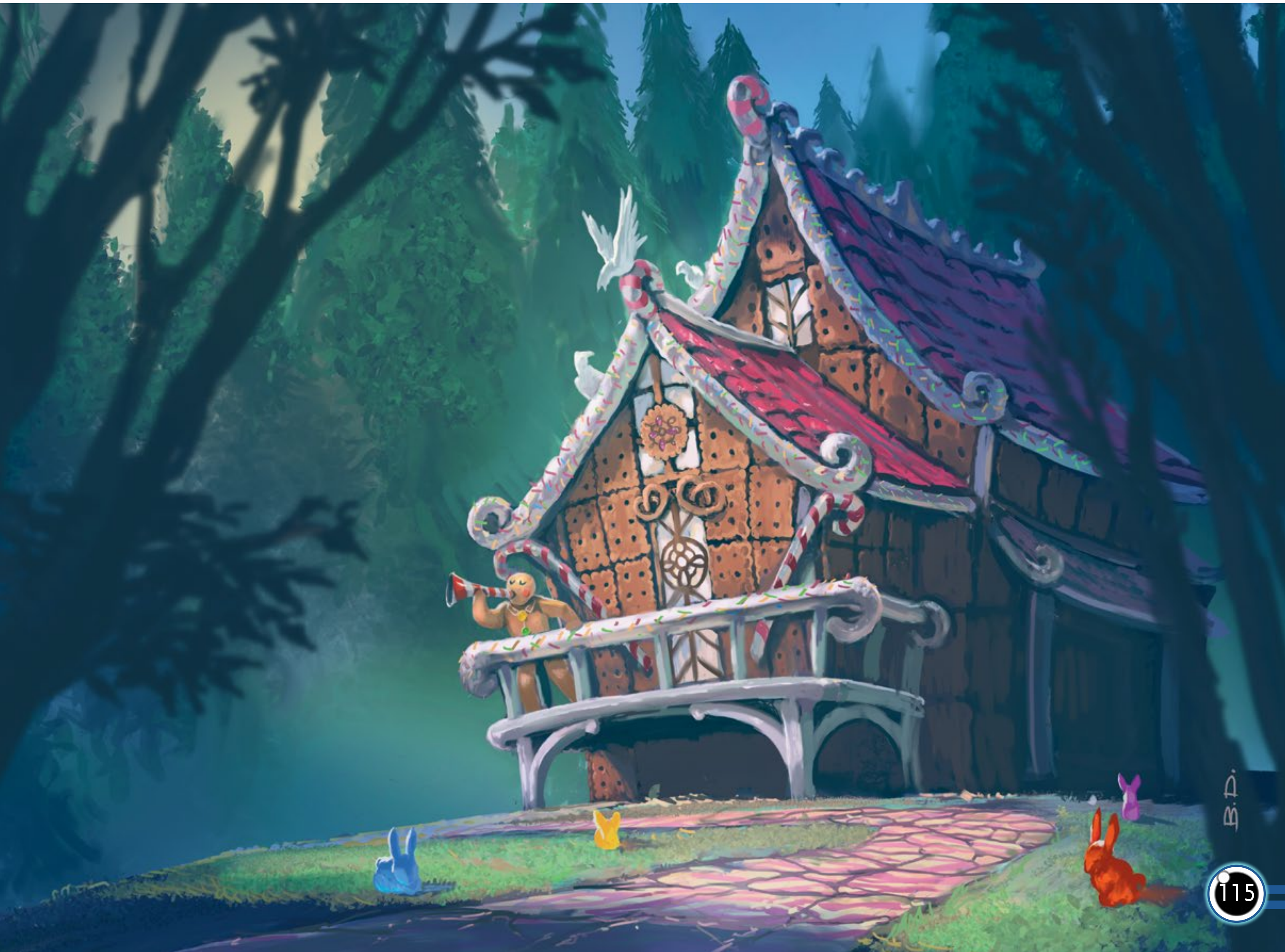
Witch in the Kitchen: An elderly woman in a colorful shawl wearing "coke-bottle" eyeglasses sits at the kitchen table decorating cookies. A massive iron stove squats in the kitchen's corner.

She is Griselda "The Hungry Witch." She is a bit blind, but knows when the PCs enter her home, even if they sneak in the back, thanks to her spells wound about her abode.

Have Some Cookies: The witch's first move is to offer PCs their choice of one cookie each from a platter of decorated treats sitting on the table. PCs may select or decline them, but those who succeed on a difficulty 4 Intellect task determine that three of the cookies are cyphers.

Griselda: *level 5, deception and disguise as level 6; health 25; short-range spell makes up to six creatures fall asleep for one minute*

Cookie cyphers, page 116



GM intrusion: *Griselda's stomach gurgles in hunger as she's talking to the negotiating character, and the witch licks her lips, revealing pointed teeth. The character realizes Griselda wants to eat them, hindering their interaction tasks with her for the rest of the encounter.*

Oven: *level 6*

Recursion Travel, page 113

The Maker, Estate operatives know, is Carter Morrison. Morrison was an important figure thanks to him discovering the Strange, creating Ardeyn, and saving Earth, apparently sacrificing himself in the process. No one has seen or heard from him in years. Why Hyde is talking about him might not be immediately clear.

Play for Sympathy: The witch suspects PCs powerful enough to defeat her gingerbread people and marshmallow kestrels (or to sneak or talk their way in) shouldn't be provoked lightly. So she leans into her "nice grandma" persona, offering the PCs hot chocolate and cookies, while complaining about the "very, very bad child" who visited her home a few days ago.

- *Naughty Visitor:* She explains that the very bad child, called Eddie, curdled her cream, destroyed most of the gingerbread army she had stacked in the cellar, and tried to eat Griselda's fingers instead of the candied versions she offered.
- *He Left That Way:* If prompted, Griselda points to the massive oven (made of real iron, not candy). "He went through there, after stealing my prize candy-cane rose, the little rascal!"
- *Promises, Promises:* If PCs promise to go after Eddie and punish him properly, Griselda promises not to hamper their departure from her home, nor try to eat them. Is she telling the truth? Maybe, but if the PCs succeed on a difficulty 4 persuasion task and promise to find "Eddie," the odds of her slamming them into the oven as they try to translate away are reduced to zero. PCs can ease the task further if they give Griselda a gift of some sort—maybe a cypher they bring into the recursion, an entertaining story, or a good recipe for sweets.
- If PCs oppose the witch directly, she brings her sleep magic to bear, and calls up two more gingerbread people from the cellar.

COOKIE CYPHERS

TINGLE SNAP

Level: 1d6 + 1

Gingerbread Form: Frosted cookie with reflective sprinkles

Effect: Each time the eater strikes a solid creature or object for the next minute, the attack generates a burst of electricity, inflicting 1 additional point of damage (2 points if the cypher is level 5 or higher).

CRUMBLE BISCUIT

Level: 1d6 + 1

Gingerbread Form: Hard, dry cookie with no frosting

Effect: If crushed and the crumbs are sprinkled on an object or surface, 10 cubic feet (.28 cubic meters) of the object is disintegrated each round for a number of rounds equal to the cypher's level.

YUMMY BUNNY

Level: 1d6 + 1

Gingerbread Form: Spongy, frosting-covered, bunny-shaped candy

Effect: Restores a number of points to the eater's Pools equal to the cypher's level.

The Oven: This expansive oven—easily large enough to cook an entire dressed bull, or six children—cooks anything placed within to perfect, tender sweetness if the oven door is latched from the outside.

- *Fissure:* A vertical fissure—glowing with pearlescent light—etches the oven's back wall. It's another slowly fading scar left behind by Hyde's use of *Worlds Numberless and Strange* to translate to another recursion, and can be used as a recursion key.
- *Message in Frosting:* Words finger-painted in frosting next to the fissure read, "I wonder if the Maker's heart will pair well with caramel? —Eddie." (The message is a taunt from Hyde.)
- *Recursion Trail Continued:* A character who succeeds on a difficulty 6 Intellect task (eased by training the PC might have in translation, and potential help from other PCs) discovers that the key allows translation to a recursion called "Krayol," one of those weird Exotic recursions. To learn more requires translating there, assuming PCs don't have some other means of learning about the place.
- *Translating in the Oven:* If PCs wish to continue tracking Mr. Hyde's recursion travel, they must begin with a ten-minute translation trance while gathered inside the oven. Krayol is level 6, but if PCs work together and rely on the translation key of the fissure itself, the translation task is eased by 2 steps, and possibly further if the PC leading the translation is trained in the task, or they apply Effort.

KRAYOL

KRAYOL ATTRIBUTES

Level: 6

Laws: Exotic

Playable Species: Human paper dolls rendered in crayon by an inexpert hand

Foci: Any focus appropriate for Earth, including a character's original focus

Trait: Artistic. If the character spends a few minutes sketching, using one of their own fingers as a crayon, and succeeds on a difficulty 3 Intellect-based task, they can create a perfectly functional (for Krayol) level 2 object.

What a Recursor Knows About Krayol: Upon arrival via translation, a recursor knows the recursion's attributes as well as the following.

- Krayol is an Exotic recursion, seeded by various stories about people entering paintings, crayon pictures, chalk drawings, and so on.
- A child is sometimes seen wandering the streets: She Who Colors. She Who Colors, also called Amanda, controls the recursion like a god. Her tempers are as changeable as a sea drawn with tempest-teal and thunderhead-blue crayons.

KRAYOL ARRIVAL

A few things are apparent when PCs arrive.

Colored Paper Scene: PCs translate into the recursion standing on a city street crafted with paper shapes and crayons. The street beneath their feet is grainy gray crayon. The buildings to either side are cut from paper sheets colored in with doors and windows. Simplistic shapes of cars, also cut from their own paper sheets and colored with crayon, are parked on the street. A bright yellow paper sun shines down above. Here and there, simple paper dolls of people in colorful crayon fashion move along the central thoroughfare, which a big sign boldly labels as Main Street.

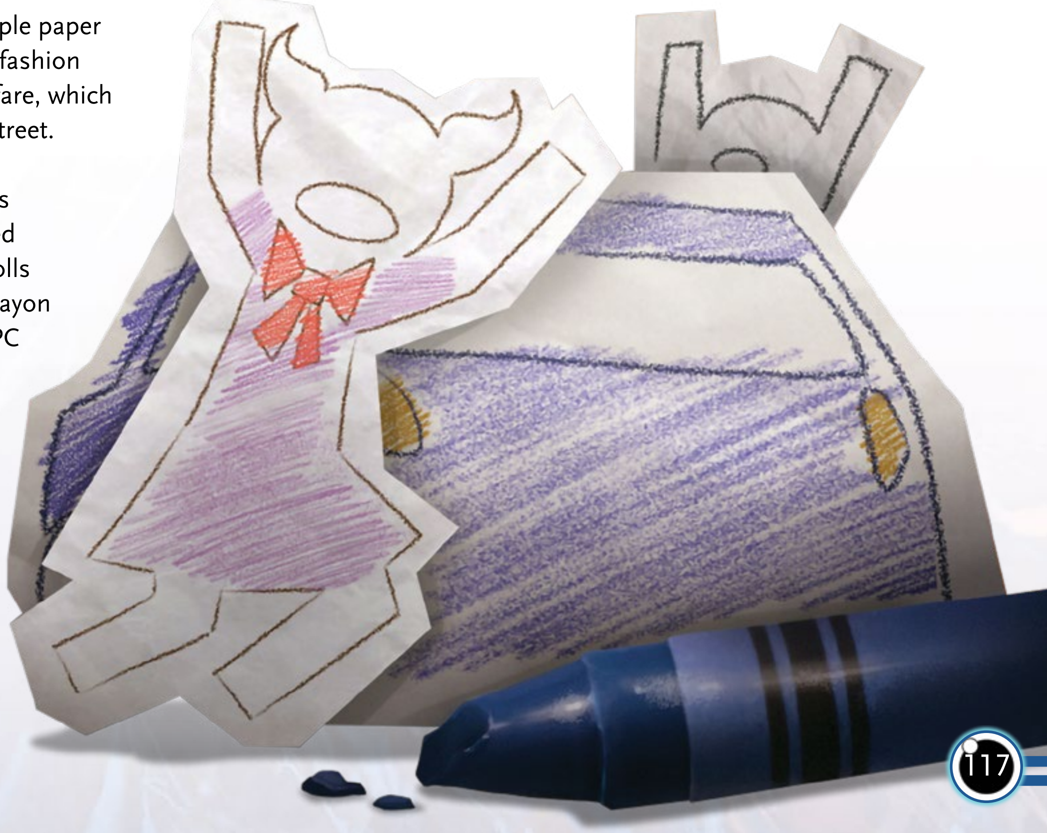
PCs Are Paper Dolls: The PCs can only take the form of animated two-dimensional human paper dolls whose features are rendered in crayon with a childish hand. Have each PC describe what they look like, even if it's something as simple as "I'm all green."

Equipment and Cyphers: PCs who arrive by translation have colored paper versions of their regular equipment and cyphers, though it all functions normally.

Focus Options: PCs can choose to regain their Earth-appropriate foci if they arrived here via Gingerbread House (where they had no foci).

No Fissure: No return fissure leading back to Gingerbread House is visible. Nor do PCs see an exit fissure, which means Hyde exited somewhere else, or he's still in the recursion. PCs need to explore the recursion further to figure out what's happening and where Hyde's gotten to.

Despite the faux 2-D appearance of the Krayol recursion, all objects, structures, and creatures within it follow the regular The Strange *(Cypher System) rules, unless noted otherwise. PCs may feel weird, but they still have a sense of touch, ability to see, and so on. In Krayol, the real world is effectively evoked, though with minimum fidelity.*



INVESTIGATING KRAYOL

PCs have a few options. They could enter a nearby shop and ask around, or they could just approach the nearest person/paper doll on the street to ask questions, either about Hyde or other news. Or they could just watch and wander, hoping something of interest draws their attention. If they choose the latter, the invasion of Krayol interrupts their exploration.

GM intrusion (group): *An animated paper sedan, careening out of control as it races down the street in a panic, sideswipes a few of the PCs. Struck PCs take 5 damage and are flung a short distance by the impact, and those that fail a difficulty 4 Might defense roll descend one step on the damage track.*

ASKING AROUND

If PCs enter a building along the street—the nearest is a shop that has a sign scrawled with the words HOT COFFEE in blue and red—they can pose their questions to a Krayol native. (If PCs ask a random person on the street, they shrug and say they're just passing by; they weren't in the area during the period the PCs are curious about. Maybe ask someone in one of the shops?)

The shop owner is Shanae: a paper doll with crayon-brown skin, braided black-and-orange hair, a yellow sundress, and a pet... dog, cat, or maybe a miniature cow; it's hard to say for sure.

Shanae: *level 2*

If PCs get Shanae talking, she tells the characters the following in answer to their questions.

Seen a stranger lately? "I sure have, pal. A purple man-thing in a top hat! Laughing like a maniac. He tore up one of my customers. And he kicked my dog!" She scowls at the PCs and her pet beast growls menacingly.

Beast: *level 3, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; bite inflicts 4 damage*

Where is the stranger now? "He asked where he could find She Who Colors. I didn't want trouble, so I told him. He never came back. And now, She Who Colors is *mad*. I wouldn't go see her right now, not for all the cappuccino in the world."

Inquiries (to Shanae or any other native) about where She Who Colors lives are answered with a finger point east along Main Street, and the answer, "the Tower."

GM intrusion (group): *Loud sniffing sounds and scratching at the door precede three paper velociraptors, who nose into the structure to investigate.*

Paper velociraptor (3): *level 4; Armor 1; bite deals 5 damage.*

INVASION IN KRAYOL

PCs aren't in Krayol for more than about five minutes when their investigation is interrupted, probably while they are in a shop talking with the owner.

Screams, Sirens: From outside the shop—or down a side street if PCs are still on Main Street— the PCs hear screams and police sirens in the distance.

Dinosaurs, Flying Saucers: A dozen paper flying saucers fan out over the street, shooting red crayon lasers at buildings, cars, and people.

Simultaneously, a pack of not especially well-drawn dinosaurs, some taller than the buildings, charge down Main Street.

Krayol natives react as one might expect: screaming, some running for shelter, a few frozen in fear.

PCs may react to this apparent double invasion however they wish, including ignoring it so they can keep looking for Hyde and/or She Who Colors, trying to take a stand and fight, helping paper doll people who are menaced by the invaders, taking shelter, or something else.

One way or the other, the invasion ceases after about 20 minutes.

FLEE/TAKE SHELTER

PCs could duck into a building (or remain in a shop, if the attack happens while they're still inside). This strategy is the cautious choice, allowing the PCs to survive the invasion without trouble, assuming no GM intrusions.

IGNORE/EVADE

PCs might try to evade the attack so they can continue their own investigation without delay. It could work; none of the invaders are specifically attacking PCs; their attacks are indiscriminate. If all the characters succeed on a difficulty 4 stealth task (eased because of the mass chaos), they can make their way along Main Street for several blocks without being personally assaulted by either flying saucers or dinosaurs, assuming no GM intrusions.

VICTIMS IN NEED OF AID

If the characters are out and about amidst the attack, one character sees a family of five—two adults, three children—get chased into a dead-end ally by three paper velociraptors with convincing roars.

If PCs do nothing to help, that's the end of that.

If the PCs assist, they easily get the dinosaurs' attention, drawing them off the scared family. But they'll have to fight.

If PCs intervene, the family escapes.

FIGHT

If the PCs make a stand in the middle of Main Street (even if it's to combat the velociraptors they lured away from the family), they could draw the attention of a paper T. rex. A few rounds after that, they attract one of the paper flying saucers whizzing overhead.

Impossible Fight: Once PCs make a stand, even if they defeat their initial opponents, they draw attention to themselves. More dinosaurs and more flying saucers converge until the PCs flee, take shelter, figure out something else, or they are overcome.

Divide and Conquer? If PCs succeed on a difficulty 3 Intellect-based task, they notice the dinosaurs and flying saucers are not working together. Maybe that makes no difference to the characters.

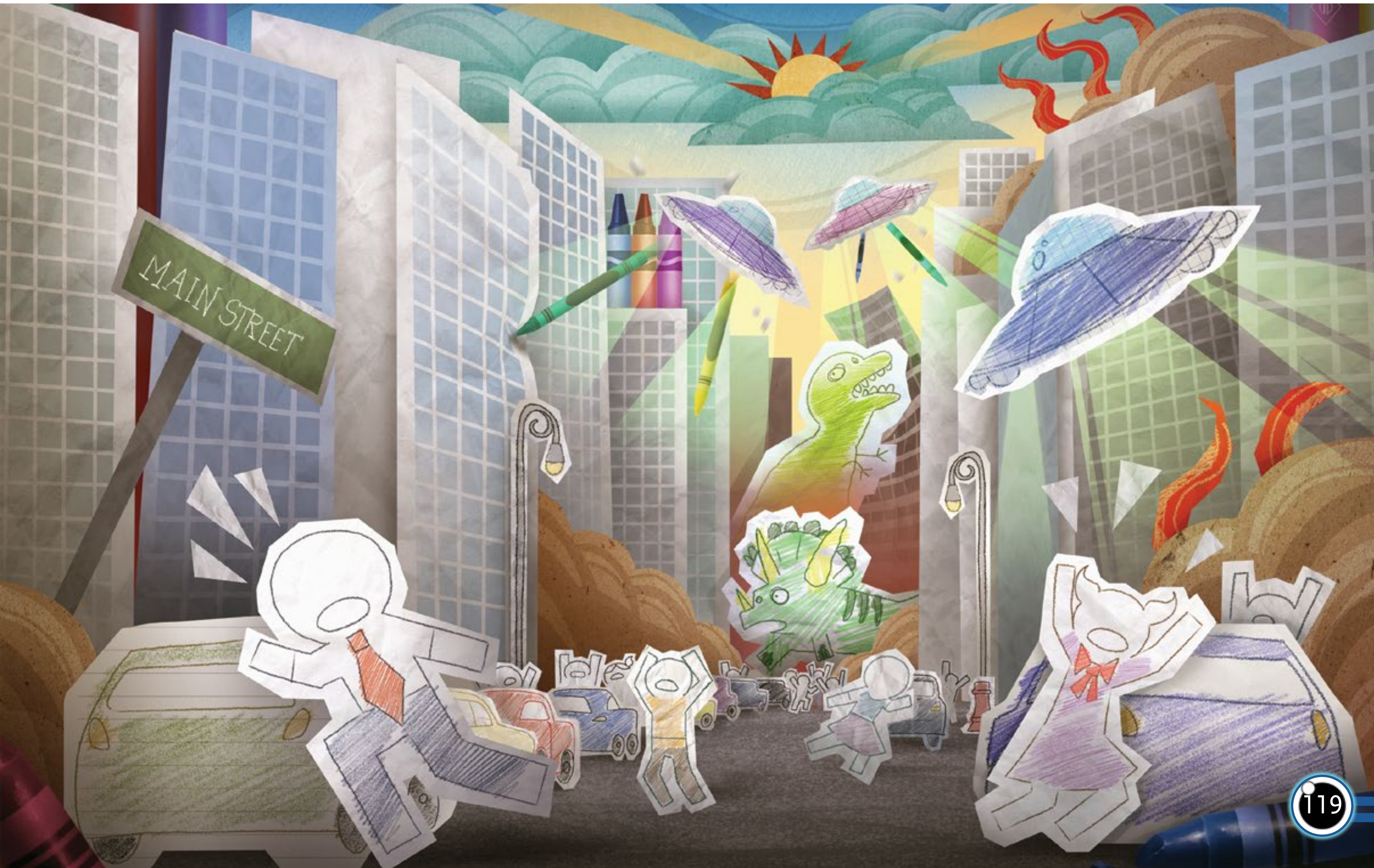
However, creative PCs might devise a plan to get the two invading forces to turn on each other.

For example, maybe the PCs work together to quickly sketch into existence (using the recursion's Artistic trait) a shoulder-mounted laser that only targets flying saucers, which they attach to a defeated (or still active) dinosaur. Or they devise some other trick. If it seems at all plausible, and if the PC in charge of the trick succeeds on a difficulty 5 deception, stealth, or similar task, the two sides begin concentrating on each other instead of PCs, human NPCs, and Main Street.

Krayol Attributes, page 117

Paper T. rex: *level 5, Speed defense as level 3 due to huge size*

Paper flying saucer: *level 5; flies a long distance each round; long-distance laser does 5 damage*



INVASION AFTERMATH

The dinosaur/flying-saucer attack concludes after about 20 minutes, or less if the PCs lured the invaders to turn on each other.

Burning Paper Vista: What was originally an idyllic crayon scene now contains smoking (great puffs of hand-torn gray and black paper) buildings and cars, dead dinosaurs surrounded by pools of red crayon blood, and a few crashed flying saucers burning bright orange.

Renewal: Surviving people emerge and begin the process of cleaning up. They seem resigned to their fate, and indeed, if one is asked, they say that as far as these events go, this one was relatively mild. "Sometimes Amanda's tantrums are much worse."

SKY TOWER OF SHE WHO COLORS

If PCs travel east along Main Street, they eventually reach the city's edge. The open countryside beyond, rendered in paper and crayon as everything else, comes to a cliff-like edge where only the foundations of a missing bridge remain.

GM intrusion: *Unless the PC succeeds on a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll (or defense roll appropriate to the method they're attempting to cross to the earthberg), they slip and fall.*

Edge of Krayol: Beyond the cliff is an endless, open sky, like renderings of what people in historical times conceived of when they imagined Earth's edge.

Here and there, paper doll people are "fishing" off its edge as placidly as if they were extending their lines into the sea.

Sky Tower Island: Floating among the clouds is an "earthberg," a chunk of floating earth a couple of miles (3 km) from the edge, from which a tall tower visibly rises. If PCs inquire about the tower with any of the fishers—the closest is a paper doll named Ray rendered in yellow crayon who's caught some interesting-looking fish with wings—they're told She Who Colors used to live in a cottage at the land's edge. But after a "wicked visitor with purple fur" showed up a few days ago, she redrew her domicile to what the PCs now see.

CROSSING TO THE SKY TOWER

Krayol's Main Street continues out of the city to land's edge, where the foundations of a missing bridge remain. There's no obvious way for PCs to get across, so some ingenuity on the PCs' part will be required.

Ability: Perhaps a PC has an ability that allows them to fly or that otherwise could be used creatively to bridge the gap between Krayol's edge and the earthberg.

Draw Something Useful: Krayol's Artistic trait gives PCs the tools they need to get across because they can effectively create any object they wish of up to level 2. At level 2, the object can't be too complex or overpowering, but the Krayol are certainly up to the challenge of creating a very simple glider, paraglider, or even a biplane to ferry PCs across.

Alternatively, PCs could decide to finish the bridge by drawing it in. Entirely doable, though would require at least a couple of hours and several PCs pitching in.

Falling Off: Characters who fall off plunge into what seems like a vast endless blue sky with no boundaries. They could fall forever, though the same options for getting across in the first place remain; for instance, a falling character could draw themselves a paraglider to slow their fall and eventually return themselves to the edge or onto the earthberg.

EARTHBERG

If PCs reach the earthberg, they find an idyllic scene on the mote of rock.

Green Hills, Big Flowers: Rolling green hills festooned with brightly colored paper flowers and fluttering paper butterflies stretch to the horizon (which isn't that far; the earthberg is roughly 1,000 feet (300 m) in diameter).

Rainbow and Tower: A multicolored rainbow arches between two clouds outlined in blue crayon. Under its arch is a simple tower that rises at least 50 feet (15 m), with a single closed door at its base. A few windows speckle the tower's sides randomly.

AUDIENCE WITH AMANDA

A glance through any window reveals blank paper; there isn't quite enough fidelity in the recursion to accurately evoke the interior. A listen likewise reveals nothing.

Entering the Tower: A knock brings no response; PCs can simply enter the tower unchallenged. They find spiraling stairs that lead up, and nothing prevents them from ascending to the single room at the tower's top.

Single Room: One large room lies at the tower's top. The central area is carpeted with layers of individual paper pages, each bearing a different crayon drawing.

A paper child and a very large paper cat are also immediately obvious.

Child with Crayon: A paper doll of a girl with brilliant red hair sprawls on the far side of the room, busily drawing.

Dozens of actual crayons are scattered within easy reach, each shocking in their realness compared to everything else in the recursion.

If PCs glance at any of the drawings covering the floor, they see images of the paper city they were just in, as well as images that include static drawings of attacking dinosaurs and flying saucers.

Cat on Mantle: A pleasantly cream-and-orange-colored animated cat drawing perches on the mantle, purring loudly. It is amenable to petting with a successful difficulty 2 persuasion task.

If PCs threaten Amanda, the cat swells to the size of a pony and defends her.

Introducing Amanda: The girl—Amanda, She Who Colors—uses nonverbal communication to answer PCs, such as nodding yes, shaking her head no, or in some instances, writing a single word on a fresh sheet of paper. Fundamentally, Amanda is a 6-year-old child going on 16 because of all the time she's spent trapped in her recursion.

AMANDA'S GIFT CYPHERS

CLOAK OF INVISIBLENESS

Level: 6

Krayol Form: Papery cloak colored red

Effect: User and up to one other character next to user become invisible for 1 hour or until they make an attack.

DYNAMITE STICK

Level: 6

Krayol Form: Cartoonish-looking dynamite stick

Effect: If thrown, the cypher travels to the indicated spot within long range and explodes in an immediate radius. Those affected in the area take 6 points of damage and are blinded on their next turn.

CRAYON OF CREATION

Krayol Level: 6

Krayol Form: Reddish crayon

Effect: User sketches an object or creature, which becomes a real version of that thing or being (of up to level 6) so long as it fits within a 10-foot (3 m) square and takes a form that is possible within the recursion in which it is used. If a creature, it obeys the user for about 10 minutes before it decides for itself what it wants to do.

The user could elect to create a weapon, which can be used for 1 minute to deal 6 points of damage to a target up to a long distance away.

Possible responses include the following.

Are you ok? Shrug; writes "mostly."

Is this your home? Reluctantly nods yes; frowns.

Did you make the dinosaurs/UFOs attack? Nods yes; impish grin.

Did a stranger/bad man/Mr. Hyde visit? Nods yes; grows upset. Asking about Hyde angers Amanda. She may answer a few more initial questions if PCs led with this one, but starts drawing a huge black spider as she gets more and more red in the face, working up to another tantrum. Talking her down requires a successful difficulty 3 persuasion task. If PCs succeed, the huge spider that emerges from the paper just scuttles away down the stairs instead of attacking.

Did the stranger/bad man take anything? Nods yes; points to crayons.

GM intrusion: *The character recognizes themself and the other PCs in one of the drawings, and the drawing stares back with equal surprise and horror; the character takes 1 Intellect damage each round, until Amanda notices and turns that piece of paper over, or the character succeeds on an Intellect defense roll on their turn.*

Cat drawing: *level 5; two claw attacks deal 6 damage each*

Huge black spider: *level 4*

Amanda: *level 6 (in Krayol); can create any level 6 effect, object, or creature appropriate to Krayol as her action if she has a crayon and paper*

A DEAL WITH AMANDA

At some point, perhaps after PCs calm a tantrum or after PCs ask a few questions that don't make her so angry, Amanda presents the PCs with the following.

Family Picture: Amanda pulls out a crayon drawing of a family of three holding hands—two adults, one child, and she's clearly the child; the miniature version of her on the page even waves.

Amanda writes "HELP?" on the page, pointing first to the depiction of herself, then to the two adults.

Then she writes "TRAPPED HERE" on the page, and points to herself.

If PCs guess—or succeed on a difficulty 3 Intellect task to figure out—Amanda wants help escaping Krayol, she nods vigorously.

Help PCs Can Offer: The PCs might consider translating back to Earth and bringing Amanda along, but they know doing so would be really hard, because she's the one that seeded Krayol. It's not completely impossible, but the translation task would be level 10.

Otherwise, the characters know that if they catch Hyde, they can retrieve *Worlds Numberless and Strange*, which is far more likely a means that Amanda could use to escape.

Failing that, the PCs know they have the resources of the Estate to call upon.

All of which is to say, PCs could promise to help Amanda in good faith. If PCs succeed on a difficulty 2 task to persuade her (she wants to believe), she accepts their offer of future aid with actual audible laughter and hugs all around.

Recursion Travel, page 113

Reuniting Amanda with her parents is the work of a couple of days of research on Earth, possibly requiring the use of *Worlds Numberless and Strange*. It's a tearful reunion, though her parents are stunned how their daughter has not aged a day in the years since she went missing in 2015.

Amanda Helps the PCs: After the PCs' promise of aid, and if they seem tired or wounded, she writes "Rest?" on a sheet of paper, and begins drawing up comfortable beds for the characters to sleep in. PCs have only a few days left to act, but they should realize they also have enough slack to regain their full capabilities.

The Escape Fissure: Amanda reveals the fissure if PCs and her get along. Or PCs might just happen to notice it after spending ten minutes or longer in the room, or if they search for it. The thick layer of crayon drawings on the floor cover it, but can easily be brushed aside.

Once exposed, the horizontal fissure on the floor glows with a familiar pearlescent light. Like the previous fissures PCs have encountered, it is a side effect of Hyde's use of *Worlds Numberless and Strange* and can be used as a recursion key.

- *Message in Crayon:* Words drawn in green crayon next to the fissure read, "If you're reading this, Carter Morrison is probably already dead. Again. —Mr. H."
- *Recursion Trail Continued:* A character who succeeds on a difficulty 3 Intellect task (eased by training the PC might have in translation and aid from allies) discovers that the key allows translation to Ardeyn, a recursion the PCs have previously visited.
- Because they've visited before, characters could simply translate to Ardeyn on their own. The problem is, they'd end up in the last location they visited, which definitely wouldn't be the location where Hyde is probably trying to free Lotan even as PCs ponder how to get to him.
- *Translating in the Tower:* If PCs wish to continue tracking Mr. Hyde directly, they must gather on the floor around the fissure and begin a ten-minute translation trance to initiate their recursion travel.

ARDEYN

ARDEYN ATTRIBUTES

Level: 3

Laws: Magic

Playable Species: Humans, qephilim

Foci: The foci the PCs previously had in Ardeyn

Trait: Brash. Tasks to ignore or overcome fear or intimidation are eased.

What a Recursor Knows About Ardeyn: Upon arrival via translation, a recursor knows the recursion's attributes and the following.

- Spirits of the dead—native or recursor—are drawn into the subterranean Night Vault.
- The Maker and Seven Incarnations who safeguarded Ardeyn are dead or missing. The Maker, who was Carter Morrison on Earth, created Ardeyn to block planetovores from directly accessing Earth, and eventually sacrificed himself to bolster's Ardeyn's fidelity some years ago.
- The entire land of Ardeyn is built upon the petrified body of a god called Lotan the Sinner. If he is ever released, Ardeyn would, by definition, be destroyed.

ARDEYN ARRIVAL

A few things become immediately apparent as PCs arrive, as described below.

PCs Translate to Ardeyn: The PCs take on their Ardeyn foci, and their gear translates to suitable fantasy-style equipment. Have each PC describe what they look like.

Nexus of Tunnels: The characters appear in complete darkness.
If one provides a light, the PCs find themselves standing in a nexus of tunnels branching away in every direction. The nexus is about 30 feet (9 m) in diameter, and six tunnels branch from it.

Remains of Conflict: About a dozen humanoid forms lie unmoving on the floor of the nexus. Horrible wounds suggest they died by violence. A handful of the bodies sprout weird, sapling-like growths the color of bone.

A closer look at the bodies reveals they are all qephilim in ceremonial robes. PCs who succeed on a difficulty 3 Intellect-based task for Ardeyn lore think they might be "Umber Judges," qephilim of the Court of Sleep who see to the souls of the dead in Ardeyn. Umber Judges are also charged with guarding passages leading to the Heart Core, where Lotan's imprisoned heart rages.

Kray Scurrier Sentries: Three kray scurriers—part crayfish, part spider, and all nightmare, about the size of a human head—are birthed in response the PCs' presence (treat as a GM intrusion). These are Hyde's first line of defense against those who'd try to prevent Lotan's freedom ritual from succeeding.

Nexus Passages: Only one passage gives access to the Heart Core, where the PCs need to go to disrupt the ritual. However, it's not immediately obvious which passage that is. PCs have a few options.

- *Explore:* PCs could randomly choose to explore from among the six tunnels in the nexus. If so, you could use the Random Exploration table to inspire additional encounters. Lucky PCs might find the right tunnel to head down relatively quickly.
- *Track:* PCs can attempt to look for clues, hoping to track the perpetrators of the slaughter into one of the tunnels. PCs who succeed on a difficulty 5 Intellect task to do so find the tunnel leading to the Heart Core thanks to a bloody bootprint remnant on the floor. If the PCs succeed on another Intellect task, they can tell the boot print is at least one day old, or older depending on how many days the PCs took to reach this point from the time they arrived at the Wyeth Hotel.

Kray scurrier (3): *level 3, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; health 12; Armor 2; pincer deals 4 damage*

PC operatives know that if Ardeyn was destroyed, the insulation Earth has from direct connection to the Strange, where planetovores lurk, would be greatly reduced. And Lotan himself would probably be the first planetovore to take advantage of that connection.

Qephilim, descended from angelic beings, are humanoid with heads resembling jackals. Especially powerful ones have "halos" in the form of a tongue of flame burning over their head.

Qephilim, page 163

Night Vault, page 183

Roads of Sorrow, page 183

Djinni, page 324

Ghost, page 331

Ghoul, page 332

Very expensive item, page 202

Soulflaying weapon, page 257

RANDOM EXPLORATION

All but one of the passages lead—after five to ten minutes of travel—to other locations found in the Night Vault and Roads of Sorrow, as shown on this table. Though potentially interesting to explore, they lie outside the focus of this adventure. Once the PCs discover an area of interest, it should be immediately clear to them they're going the wrong way, allowing them to retreat and try another tunnel.

d6	Discovery
1	Remains of a long-dead bestial being wearing once-fine clothes. A search of the corpse reveals a djinni lamp trapping a djinni with one wish left to offer.
2	Chamber filled with towering mushroom-like growths that mutter and curse, but do not move.
3	This tunnel leads to the Heart Core.
4	An erratic and dangerous ghost haunts this chamber. It does know the way to the Heart Core.
5	An ice-cold subterranean river cuts through this chamber. Weird fossils in the ceiling and riverbank resemble far larger versions of the kray scurriers PCs encountered in the nexus.
6	Four veiled undead ghouls guard a locked mausoleum (level 7) containing a jackal-headed humanoid corpse wearing a very expensive amount of jewelry, clutching a soulflaying weapon (a sword) with its mummified hands.

HEART CORE

PCs that choose the passage leading to the Heart Core see light ahead after traveling for just a couple of minutes. If they keep going, the light quickly intensifies, showing a strong orange tint, as if leading to some great fire.

Which is exactly what PCs find when they reach the tunnel's end.

Magma Sea Surrounds Platform: A magma sea covers this huge subterranean vault to an unknown depth. A stone causeway stretches from the entrance tunnel out over the sea in a series of arches, connecting to a wide, circular stone platform rising above the magma sea.

The causeway is about 100 feet (30 m) long, 5 feet (1.5 m) wide, and rises some 50 feet (15 m) above the molten stone to the circular platform. The central platform is roughly 100 feet (30 m) in diameter.

The heat in the core is brutal, but survivable in the short term, assuming no one falls in the magma.

Flaming "Heart" Chained: A fiery monstrosity, vaguely humanoid, hangs above the central platform, suspended by seven equidistantly spaced red-hot chains. A miasma of ashen smoke swirls around the straining figure, sometimes resolving into demonic faces that cry out in atonal song.

The chained figure, a good 50 feet (15 m) tall, is held about 30 feet (12 m) off the ground. The figure is actually Lotan's heart, not the rocky organ PCs might have expected. The ashy miasma surrounding it is composed of bodiless demons, singing to Lotan in atonal voices meant to soothe their master. Unless a GM intrusion causes a demon to target a character, they normally take no direct action against the PCs.

STAWICKI '24

Attacking objects, page 113

Mr. Hyde: *level 6; health 22; Armor 1; two melee punches or short-range blasts of purple fire deal 6 damage each; while performing the ritual, he can only make one attack per round, andall his actions are hindered by two steps*

Umber Judge (Lotan cultist): *level 4; health 23; Armor 1; long-range spirit whip attack inflicts 4 Intellect damage (ignores Armor)*

Umber Judge, page 285
Kray, page 276

Kray drone: *level 5, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; health 19; Armor 3; two short-range web attacks cocoon targets, who take 5 damage each round until they escape*

Kray scurrier: *level 3, Speed defense as level 4 due to size; health 12; Armor 2; pincer deals 4 damage*

Demon: *level 4; touch attack inflicts 5 damage, or on a failed Intellect defense roll, allows demon to enter and possess character until character succeeds on an Intellect defense roll to force it out*

Magma deals 20 ambient damage per round to characters that fall into it.

Ritual Celebrants: Assembled on the central platform directly beneath the suspended burning titan are two human-sized figures standing on either side of a summoning circle. Also present on the platform is a monstrously large lobster-crayfish, and several much-smaller versions that scurry about.

Specifics include the following.

- One humanoid is a purple-furred qephilim in robes, a purplish flame burning spitefully between his ears, loudly incanting a magical ritual. (This is Mr. Hyde, translated to Ardeyn form. While his attention remains focused on the ritual, all his tasks, including attacks and defenses, are hindered by two steps. However, he can take one offensive action once each round and still maintain his chant.)
- The other humanoid wears a helm and robes. (This is an Umber Judge that succumbed to Lotan worship long ago. She is one of the cultists responsible for turning Farkin to the same nihilistic religion. She was surprised by Hyde's assumption of Farkin's role, but accepting. She's observing the ritual, and dives into any fight with intruders, yelling "Lotan will be released, as foretold!")
- The horse-sized lobster-crayfish is a kray drone. It viciously attacks intruders.
- The four smaller ones—part crayfish, part spider—are kray scurriers. They're ready to attack intruders.
- The summoning circle is an immediate distance in diameter. It contains seven small objects, equidistantly positioned; these are the symbolic talismans Farkin and Hyde gathered. A golden shimmer is just visible at the circle's center.

  Studying the glow reveals the image of an unconscious human male, incorporeal, but slowly gaining solidity as the ritual continues.

CONFLICT IN THE HEART CORE

If PCs make themselves known by trying to disrupt the ritual, the gathered celebrants react violently. Hyde must stay within immediate range of the summoning circle to keep it going, but the others are free to move as needed to engage PCs.

Ways PCs can end the ritual include:

- Preventing Hyde from continuing the ritual for four consecutive rounds, which ruins it. All the symbolic talismans burn up in the heat, and more would have to be gathered.
- Destroying even one of the symbolic talismans, which has the same effect as above.
- Disabling or killing Hyde, which has the same effect as above. Only Hyde, or someone like Hyde, can complete the ritual.

Of course, even as PCs attempt to stop the ritual, the Umber Judge and associated creatures do their best to keep it going by eliminating the characters. In addition to directly engaging the PCs with violence, additional complications might arise.

GM Intrusion Possibilities:

- The Umber Judge utters an arcane word, and a demon from the miasma attempts to possess a character.
- The titanic burning figure secured overhead struggles mightily in their bonds. One chain, weakened by the ritual, snaps, whipsawing across the platform and striking a character for 6 points of damage, and on a failed difficulty 4 Might defense roll, stuns them so they lose their next turn.
- Another kray scurrier runs up from the direction of the nexus, sacrificing itself to knock a character who is still standing on the causeway or near the platform's edge into the magma. The character must make a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll to cling to the edge of the causeway or platform and avoid falling into the magma.
- Mr. Hyde takes his full attention away from the ritual to attack the character. This round, he can take actions normally and isn't hindered by two steps until the beginning of his next turn.

CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

In Ardeyn, Mr. Edward Hyde appears as a qephilim with unsettling purple fur and a jackal's visage far more bestial than most others (akin to a sark). A purplish flame burns between his ears, and he wears ceremonial robes.

Hyde's Motive: The more pain and suffering Mr. Edward Hyde creates, the more unholy glee he experiences. He's decided that being directly responsible for a planetovore eating Earth is his purpose in life. But along the way, his petty malice and sadistic urges sometimes work against his greater goals. (Case in point: taunting the Estate with his tip-off call.)

Dr. Jekyll? In the last few months, Hyde's personality has become the dominant one in the body shared with Dr. Jekyll. Dr. Jekyll can no longer emerge—at least not without another dose of his elixir, and then only for two rounds at most. Dr. Jekyll has been missing a *lot* of time, as even when he was working with Farkin, Hyde was subtly influencing and controlling him.

If PCs somehow get Jekyll to appear (perhaps by dosing Hyde with a syringe of batch 77), they might be able to convince him—with a successful difficulty 3 persuasion task—to take some drastic action to end the ritual, such as by taking a dive into the magma.

Dr. Jekyll: *level 2, mad science tasks as level 6*

Sark, page 288

Batch 77, page 111

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs stop Mr. Hyde's ritual, the shimmering figure in the center of the summoning circle opens his eyes, says "Thank you," to the PCs in a quiet voice, then fades away. When he disappears, any damage done to the Heart Core, including any broken chains, is mended. Does this mean Carter Morrison has returned? Or did his essence, briefly summoned by Hyde, return to the fabric of Ardeyn to strengthen it? Only time will tell.

PCs can also gather *Worlds Numberless and Strange* from a defeated Hyde (even if he went into the magma, the book preserves itself). The Estate wants it back, but perhaps the PCs can use it on loan now and then.

If the PCs fail to stop Mr. Hyde's ritual, it goes to completion. Carter Morrison is fully resolved. Can Mr. Hyde, and other cultists gathering nearby, actually destroy him? Maybe, if they get the jump on him before his full faculties as the Maker return. Killing the Maker would probably free Lotan. On the other hand, slaying the Maker, even at half strength, isn't a foregone conclusion.

WORLDS NUMBERLESS AND STRANGE

Level: 10

Form: A deluxe, highly stylized tome with metallic covers

Effect: Contains information on every recursion, including some details of a location in a recursion a reader already knows at least a little something about. If asked, the tome creates a translation key, which resembles a glowing fissure (only visible to quickened creatures), on a specified surface keyed to a location noted in the book. A fissure lasts up to two weeks and can be used by recursors to translate to the linked location until then. A translating recursor can also help a non-quickened target to come along as part of a successful translation.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (check per recursion key requested; if depleted, instead of forming the last recursion key requested, the enraged book inflicts 10 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) to the reader. When the book's wrath fades after a day, readers can again attempt to use it to gain its effect.)

XP FOR CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Award each PC 3 XP for ending the threat of Mr. Hyde, 1 XP if they convinced the witch in the Gingerbread House to not slam them in the oven, and 1 XP if they rescue Amanda from Krayol.

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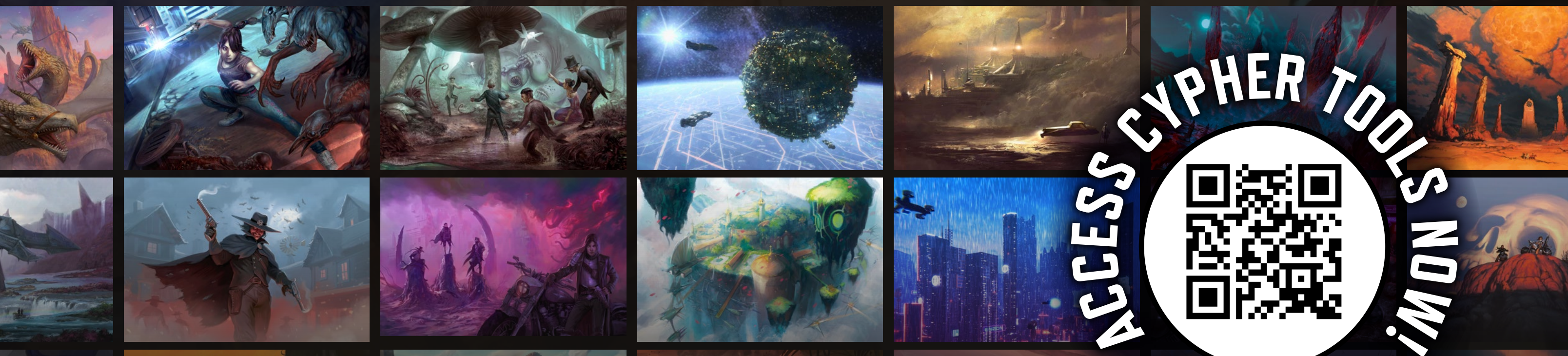

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